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Toshiba CEVO: smartest TV ever!

How super-computer tech makes this 55in LED TV an HD hero

MONKEY BUSINESS
The SFX secrets of Rise of the Planet of the Apes p94

Wired in and ready to rumble
Putting the finishing touches to our DIY install

+
- CAPTAIN AMERICA
- SUPER 8
- CARS 2
- HORRIBLE BOSSES

& MORE...

ONKYO BLU
High-end player gets THX seal of approval p76

SpeakerCraft
Roots 5.1 – did it grow on us?

Small speakers, big sound
Sub/sat systems rated in our grouptest

Inside OPTOMA HD83 PJ BRINGS 3D TO THE MASSES
ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES → PANASONIC'S 'XXX' TV SECRET

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EDITORIAL TEAM
Deputy Editor Mark Craven
News Editor Anton van Beek
Art Editor John Rook

CONTRIBUTORS
Richard Stevenson, Adrian Justins, Steve May, John Archer, Adam Rayner, Danny Phillips, Martin Pipe, Barry Fox

ADVERTISING
Senior Advertising Executive Jack O'Sullivan
Tel: 0844 848 5245
E-mail: jack.o'sullivan@myhobbystore.com
Online sales Ben Rayment
Tel: 0844 848 5240
E-mail: ben.rayment@myhobbystore.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Subscriptions manager Paul Molyneux
UK: New, renewals and enquiries
Tel: 0845 677 7807
E-mail: hcc@subscription.co.uk
USA & CANADA: New, renewals and enquiries
Tel: (001) 877 363 1310
E-mail: expsmag@expressmag.com
REST OF WORLD: New, renewals and enquiries
Tel: +44 (0)8456 777 807
BACK ISSUES
Tel: 0844 848 8822
From outside the UK: +44 (0)1689 869896
E-mail: customer.services@myhobbystore.com

MANAGEMENT TEAM
Group Editor Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk
Group Sales Manager Duncan Armstrong
Head of Design and Production Julie Miller
E-commerce Manager Amanda Lee
Chief Executive Owen Davies
Chairman Peter Harkness

Published by MyHobbyStore Ltd
Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BG
Tel: 0844 412 2262
From outside the UK: +44 (01689) 869896
E-mail: customer.services@myhobbystore.com
www.myhobbystore.com

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TV with brains, p50

WELCOME



For a while, we feared that Toshiba's CELL-powered TV technology would never make it to the UK. Instead, it had looked destined to join the likes of Pioneer's 10th-generation Kuros as products we'd seen but would never get the chance to own. And, yes, that's still half true. The new CEVO TV reviewed in this issue (see page 50) shares much of the brainpower of its Japanese stablemate, yet misses out on some of the more leading-edge features. But make no mistake – **it's a remarkable display, and one that puts Toshiba right back in the bigscreen TV game**.

Now, that's something we can all be grateful for. The road to flatscreen heaven is littered with so many corpses (Pioneer, NEC, Fujitsu, Hitachi, JVC...) that our choices as buyers have become more and more limited. Having brands like Toshiba pushing the technology envelope can only be good for all of us. And don't forget its 4K, glasses-free TV is also on the horizon...

Mark Craven
Deputy Editor



MENU

BUYER'S GUIDE
Our pick of the best AV hardware p111

BULLETIN

The place for hot products, trends and technology. Starts... p7

07 Ten of the best
Sky+ celebrates its 10th birthday

08 Playing with 3D
Gaming projector makes 3D affordable

09 BD spending on the up
Hi-def discs provide 'gateway to the future'

10 Adult VOD on Smart TV
Panasonic's 'XXX' secret revealed

11 Gunfight at the E.T. Corral
Cowboys & Aliens beams onto BD and DVD

12 Sky Movies hooks up
New website and iPhone app unleashed



16 Is your home cinema costing the Earth?
Running a 'green' home cinema isn't just about saving the planet, it could also save you money!

FEATURES

In-depth interviews and special reports. Starts... p16

34 Cinema chic
Take a tour of this style-conscious eight-seater pro-install

COVER STORY **40 Fit for purpose**
Part three of our DIY install sees the last of the hardware installed

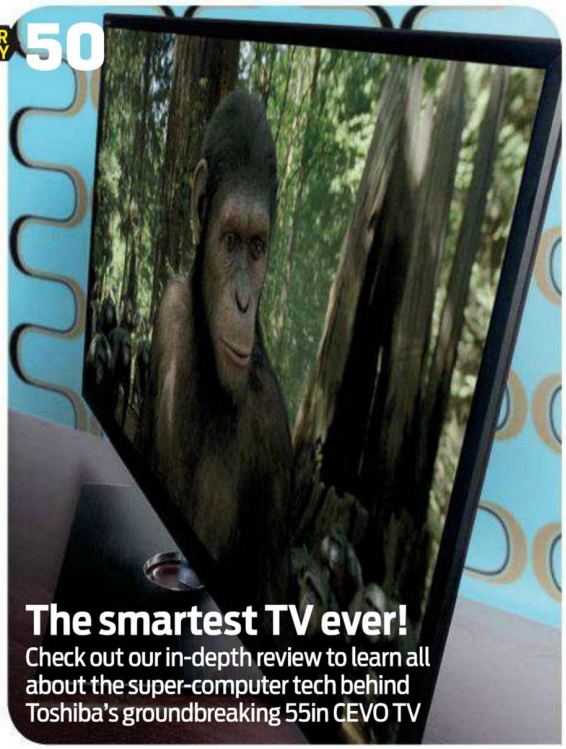
92 Finishing touches
We round up the latest AV accessories

94 Monkey business
The SFX secrets of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* revealed!

100 Film fanatic
The Beek gets stressed out by awards

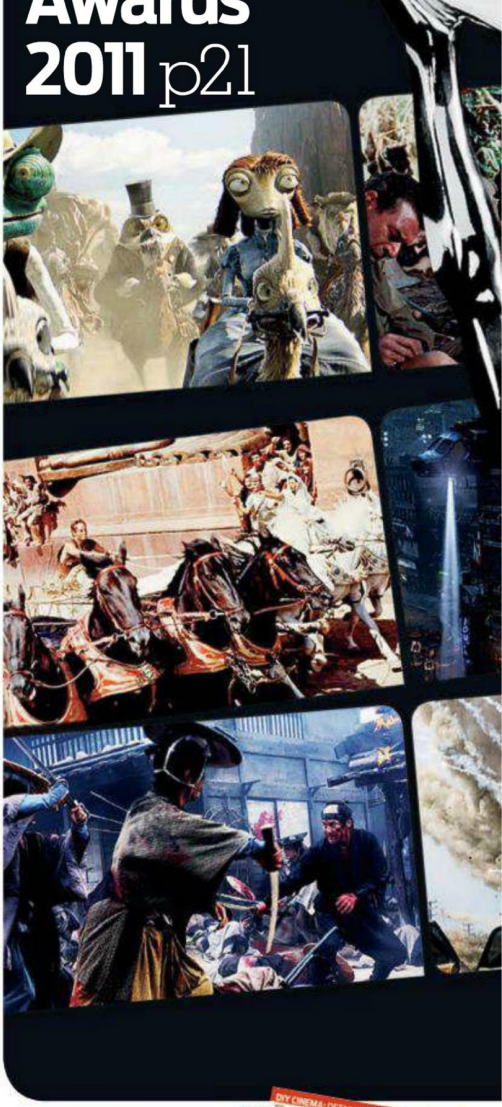
104 Download central
Netflix is coming, but why should you care?

122 Point of View
All hail the pocket-sized packets of tech



COVER STORY **50**

The smartest TV ever!
Check out our in-depth review to learn all about the super-computer tech behind Toshiba's groundbreaking 55in CEVO TV



Movie Awards 2011 p21

27 Subscribe!
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Our guarantee to you: Equipment reviewed in *Home Cinema Choice* is measured and quantified by AV Tech Labs, which sets the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase

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Adam Rayner: The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Richard Stevenson: Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal *ERT*



Steve May: *HCC*'s former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journos



John Archer: The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early *HCC* staffer



Danny Phillips: Former editor of *What Video & High-Definition TV* and dedicated AV boffin



Adrian Justins: Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*



We celebrate the year's best movie releases and highlight the Blu-rays that every home cinema fan must own!

PLAYBACK

HCC's software experts cast a critical eye over the latest Blu-ray and DVD titles. Starts... p97

98 Super 8
99 Horrible Bosses
Kill List
Community: Season 1
Zookeeper
100 Mildred Pierce
Smallville: The Final Season
Torchwood: Miracle Day
Tales from the Darkside: Season 1
101 Captain America: The First Avenger
102 Cars 2 3D
103 Kung Fu Panda 2
Freedom
Redline
Peter Gabriel: New Blood 3D
Slash: Made in Stoke – Live
104 The Conversation
The Outsiders
Brazil
The Three Colours Trilogy
105 Conan the Barbarian 3D
106 Futurama: Season 5
The Human Centipede 2
Straw Dogs
The Exterminator
Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale















REVIEWS

With a focus on performance, these are in-depth tests you can trust... p49

50 Toshiba 55WL863 COVER STORY
55in LED TV brings CELL power to the UK

54 Onkyo TX-NR5009 COVER STORY
This fully-featured flagship 9.2-channel AV receiver is a real keeper

58 KEF Q Series 5.1
Pioneering Uni-Q tech drives this speaker array to a peerless percussive pinnacle

62 Optoma HD83
Aggressively-priced stereoscopic projector brings 3D to the masses

66 Hannspree SV28LMMB
Budget LED TV with 16:10 ratio panel

66 Panasonic DMR-HW100
Freeview+HD with 3D conversion tech

68 Sennheiser PX360BT
High-tech wireless Bluetooth headphones

68 Duracell Portable 5-hour Charger
USB charger eliminates battery drain woes

70 SpeakerCraft RooTs 5.1 COVER STORY
Unashamedly upmarket sub/sat 5.1 system with designer appeal

72 Sony KDL-55HX923
Has this ambitious 55in Bravia 3DTV bitten off more than it can chew?

76 Onkyo BD-SP809
Debut 3D Blu-ray player with THX's seal of approval

78 Hauppauge Colossus
Capture high-definition video to your PC

80 Yamaha BD-A1010 Aventage
Universal 3D Blu-ray player with full network functionality

83 Lounge lizards
On the lookout for a living room-friendly sub/sat package? Then check out our grouptest of three such systems...
Canton Movie 125 MX
Tannoy HTS-101
Teufel Columna 100

PLUS...

44 AV Clinic
Your home cinema and tech queries

46 Feedback
Share your thoughts with other AV addicts. There's no better venue

111 Select
Essential guide to the UK's AV gear!

117 Next Issue
We reveal the home cinema of the future and uncover Sony's plans for 4K



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BULLETIN

→News highlights **20TH CENTURY FOX** Blu-ray boost stems disc sale decline **PANASONIC** 'XXX' Smart TV secret revealed **SKY MOVIES** Website and app makes finding films easy **OPTOMA** 'Gaming projector' provides affordable route to bigscreen 3D **NEWS X10** Hot stories in bite-size chunks **COWBOYS & ALIENS** Harrison Ford shoots first this time **AND MUCH MORE!**



Style council

Sky+HD Designer Box Collection → www.sky.com/designerboxes

2011 marks the tenth anniversary of Sky+ and to celebrate, the sat-caster is launching ten limited edition 1TB Sky+HD boxes. Priced at £50 for existing Sky customers upgrading to the HD package, or £150 for new customers joining with the HD pack, the boxes have been exclusively designed by what Sky claims are 'some of Britain's most high-profile fashion, fabric and jewellery designers'. These include Agent Provocateur, Basso & Brooke, Celia Birtwell, Farrow & Ball, Jay Jay Burridge, Julie Verhoeven, Matthew Williamson, Richard Nicoll and Solange Azagury-Partridge – none of which mean a thing to us, but then we write for *HCC* not *Vogue*.








Playing with 3D

Optoma GT750 → www.optoma.co.uk

Although designed primarily for use with 'today's top 3D games consoles and gaming PCs', Optoma's latest projector may be the ideal solution for those looking for an affordable way into the world of bigscreen 3D. Admittedly, the projector is only 720p, but the GT750 is still compatible with 3D Blu-ray, Sky and videogames thanks to its integrated 3D-XL technology. Other features include a claimed 3000 ANSI lumens brightness, integrated 10W stereo speakers and twin HDMI 1.4a inputs.

The GT750 projector can be yours for just £560, or £600 for the GT750-XL package that also includes one set of 3D glasses.

Partner with...

Arcam AVR400
3D-ready AV receiver
£1,800 approx



Yes, we know it's not new. Indeed, we already reviewed it back in *HCC* #194. So why recommend it now? Quite simply, there's never been a better time to pick one up. Until December 31, Arcam is offering a deal allowing UK customers a £400 guaranteed trade-in against the 7.1-channel AVR400 when you bring in your old AV receiver (no matter the make, model or age). But you'd better be quick if you want to take advantage of it.
www.arcam.co.uk

See-thru sound



Transparent speaker specialist Ferguson Hill is introducing a 2.1 home theatre system designed to provide 'a sensational stylish look whilst delivering subtle and totally unique sound to a TV system' according to the innovative UK manufacturer. The FH009 will set you back around £800 and features twin clear acrylic horn speakers matched with a control unit (in a choice of black or white finishes) that's designed to sit under a TV, and features an integrated class A-B amplifier and twin bass speakers with 5in drivers.
www.fergusonhill.co.uk

Max power



UK distributor Redline has started shipping Velodyne's EQ-Max subs to these shores. Described by the distributor as 'the first cost-effective subwoofer to combine remote controlled Auto EQ and high performance bass reproduction', each EQ-Max sub features a Class D amplifier complemented by one of Velodyne's 'Extended Excursion' drivers, plus one-touch remote control setup with built-in DSP processing. The EQ-Max Series consists of four models with a choice of 8-, 10-, 12- and 15in drivers, priced between £500 and £1,350.
www.red-line.co.uk

Scandynasty



From the outside, Scandyna's Minipod Mk II looks like the same semi-organic, three-legged speaker that we've all come to know and love. But on the inside there have been a number of changes, including a redesigned mid/bass driver with a new four-layer aluminium voice coil for improved efficiency, and the crossover point has been changed from 2700Hz to 3000Hz for improved bass response. The Minipod Mk II is available in a choice of red, white and black (additional colours are available on request), priced around £550 per pair.
www.scandyna-uk.co.uk

Blu-ray spending on the up

Spearheads industry growth and provides 'gateway to the future'

It's been a tough time for the home entertainment industry recently, thanks to declining DVD sales and the effects of the economic downturn as a whole. However, recent figures out of the US indicate that increased spending on Blu-ray might turn that around.

The Digital Entertainment Group's Third Quarter 2011 report shows that home entertainment spending rose by five per cent in the US, the first increase since Q1 2008, with Blu-ray sales up 58 per cent year-on-year. And the good news isn't just confined to the US. 'There are new standards being set all the time about how Blu-ray is performing in the UK' stated Robert Price, managing director, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, when *HCC* caught up with him to talk about the DEG report.

Monkey business

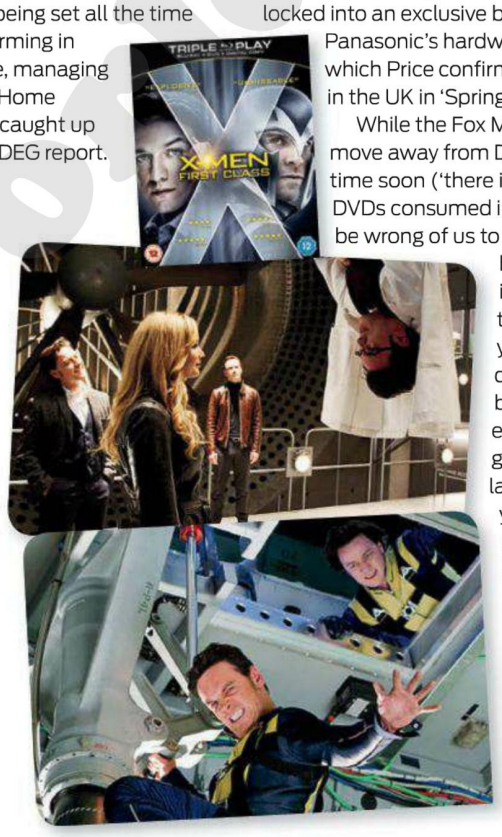
According to Price, Blu-ray typically makes up around 35 per cent of a title's sales in the UK, although Fox's recent *X-Men: First Class* notched up an impressive 40 per cent. And he doesn't think we'll be left waiting too much longer for a film that'll hit the all-important 50-50 tipping point: 'I think that *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* is the kind of movie that will take you to that point. And I feel, sat here today, very optimistic that we may get to that. Certainly in the initial launch period'.



Robert Price: 20th Century Fox's MD expects big things from BD and UltraViolet

3D Blu-ray is also starting to make its presence felt in the market, albeit in a fairly small way at this point. 'Clearly the numbers are modest, but not as modest as we would have anticipated,' revealed Price. And things can only get better when the studio is finally able to bring *Avatar* 3D to retail (following a deal that has seen the title locked into an exclusive bundle deal with Panasonic's hardware for the past year), which Price confirmed will be happening in the UK in 'Spring next year'.

While the Fox MD rules out a complete move away from DVD-only releases any time soon ('there is still a vast amount of DVDs consumed in the UK and it would be wrong of us to walk away from that') he sees Blu-ray as an important step towards the industry's future. 'If you think about what we do with Triple Play, you buy one thing and it plays everywhere... And as time goes on and UltraViolet launches into the market, you'll get another set of rights with a digital locker that gives you more flexibility. For me, Blu-ray is the perfect gateway into that future'.



First class: The new X-Men film was a Blu-ray hit in the UK

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month



X-Men: First Class (Region B BD)

Marvel's mutants meet '60s chic on a Blu-ray that's as gorgeous as its leading ladies. *CJ*

The Lion King 3D (All-region BD)



If you're still looking for a reason to upgrade to 3D, then you need to check out this faultless conversion of the 1994 Disney classic 'toon. *MC*

Silent Running (Region B BD)



Classic sci-fi that works just as well for people who don't like the genre, beautifully remastered for Blu-ray. *JL*

Saints Row: The Third (Xbox 360)



This *GTA*-wannabe carves its own niche with its completely OTT action and sense of humour. *JW*

A Nightmare on Elm Street Collection (All-region BD)



How could I not fall in love with a Blu-ray boxset offering all seven *Elm Street* flicks remastered in hi-def? *AvB*

Talkback

Team *HCC* discusses the pros and cons of adult VOD content



If you'd asked me which brand would be the first to let 'specialist' movies contaminate its Smart TV service, I would never have said Panny. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if this particular VOD library disappeared as mysteriously as it first arrived. Let's face it, those who want to watch adult material will already be doing so, and the last thing Panasonic needs while it pushes Smart TV as the future of family entertainment is even the remotest whiff of naughtiness. Even the few quid it can earn isn't worth that hassle. **MC**



To be honest, I'm amazed that it's taken this long for somebody to start testing the waters with adult content through Smart TV portals. In fact, I'd go so far as to congratulate Panasonic on getting there first, if only anybody from the manufacturer was willing to talk about it.

The only concerns I have regard the lack of age-restrictions and the question marks surrounding the legality of making these specific titles available if they don't meet the ATVOD guidelines. It would be a shame to see adult VOD cut down so soon, simply because of some editorial oversights. **AvB**

Adult VOD powers Smart TV

Acetrax brings adult content to 'Porno-sonic' streaming portal

Could the adult entertainment industry drive the take-up of Smart TV technology? Certainly Panasonic seems to think so, as Video on Demand movie service Acetrax is now pioneering adult VOD, under the Blue Nightline label, exclusively via the brand's VIERA Connect Smart TV portal. 'XXX' content can be streamed directly to Panasonic TVs, BD players and home cinema systems, a first for the UK CE industry.

Although the Acetrax movie VOD service is available on several Smart TV platforms, adult content can currently only be accessed on Panasonic products. The two companies make unlikely bedfellows, with the latter being arguably the most straight-laced and conservative of all the Japanese TV makers.

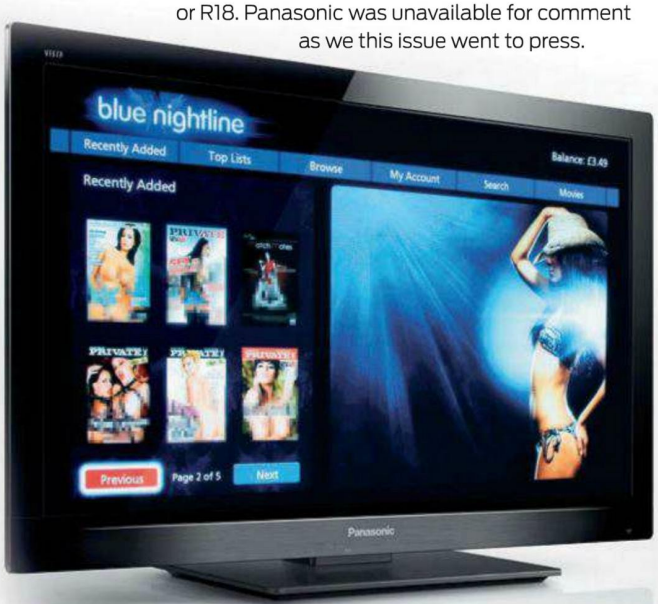
However, there's very little straight-laced about the adult VOD on offer – unless you count the fetish gear. Much of the material seems to originate from leading European porn studio Private, and the title list leaves little to the imagination.

Currently VOD services are not subject to Ofcom's broadcasting code. Instead, responsibility of regulating all editorial content has been delegated to the Authority for Television on Demand (ATVOD). ATVOD implements the European AVMS (Audio Visual Media Service) directive, which stipulates that TV-like services are obliged to abide by a set of minimum standards. VOD providers must also ensure that contentious material must be secured from under-eighteens.

PIN protection

Currently, the service requires existing Acetrax subscribers to set up a dedicated Adult PIN to gain access, in addition to its regular Acetrax login details. The precaution is not age-restrictive and does not require a credit card – anyone with access to a PC and five minutes of free time can access the service.

The ATVOD definition of what is permissible is a little woolly, but critically it says that while material certified 18 by the BBFC would not be considered a contravention of broadcasting standards, material rated R18 certainly would. A search of the BBFC database for titles listed on the Acetrax service would indicate that they had been nowhere near the BBFC, let alone certified 18 or R18. Panasonic was unavailable for comment as we this issue went to press.



True blue: VOD service adds smut to Smart TV

Spy games



Thriller fans can look forward to an exciting start to the New Year with the news that StudioCanal is bringing the bigscreen adaptation of John le Carre's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* to Double Play Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on January 30. Having sent our own spies to infiltrate the distributor, we can reveal that the Blu-ray disc will include a commentary by leading man Gary Oldman and director Thomas '*Let the Right One In*' Alfredson, four interviews, deleted scenes, five behind-the-scenes featurettes, a photo gallery and trailers.
www.studiocanal.co.uk

Universal 100



Universal Studios celebrates its centenary in 2012 and is marking the occasion with a year-long series of new and reissue catalogue BD and DVD releases under a Universal: 100th Anniversary Edition banner. Hopes are high that this is connected to studio honcho Ron Meyer's recent announcement that the celebrations will include 'a significant commitment to the restoration of some of our best loved films'. Fingers-crossed that this means more Spielberg and Hitchcock movies on Blu-ray in the coming year.
www.universalpictures.co.uk

Diamond dogs



Walt Disney Home Entertainment has officially confirmed that its 1955 animated classic *Lady & the Tramp* will be the next release in its range of celebrated Diamond Edition Blu-rays. Due to make its debut in February, *Lady & the Tramp* isn't getting a 3D makeover for its hi-def debut, but will be presented in its original 2.55:1 aspect ratio and will benefit from Disney's usual painstaking restoration process.

The studio has also announced that 1950's *Cinderella* will make its Diamond Edition debut next Autumn.
www.disney.co.uk

BD burns rubber



Icon Home Entertainment is revving up its engine and getting ready to steer Nicolas Winding Refn's acclaimed neo-noir *Drive* to Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on January 30. The award-winning film stars Ryan Gosling as a Hollywood stunt performer who moonlights as a getaway for criminals. Naturally, he ends up getting out of his depth when a heist goes awry and he gets involved with the wrong woman. There's no word on Blu-ray extras yet, but at the very least we hope to see the five featurettes confirmed for Sony's upcoming US BD.
www.iconmovies.co.uk

Gunfight at the E.T. Corral

Cowboys & Aliens → Paramount Home Entertainment → All-region BD/R2 DVD



The Wild West gets even wilder on December 26 when this blockbuster genre mash-up explodes onto DVD and Blu-ray in the UK. Based on the comic book of the same name, *Cowboys & Aliens* pits Daniel Craig and Harrison Ford as cowboys against some nasty alien invaders, with sci-fi babe *de jour* Olivia Wilde on hand to add a little glamour. The Triple Play Blu-ray release promises an extended cut of the flick alongside six interviews, an audio commentary and a five-part *Making of*... documentary.

Tech Diary

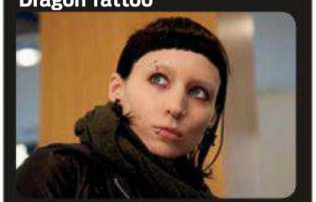
Our calendar is here to make sure you don't miss out...

→ DECEMBER

16: Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows
The game is afoot as Robert Downey Jr's Great Detective and Jude Law's Dr Watson return to UK cinemas today.
www.warnerbros.co.uk

25: Christmas Day
Swap gifts, stuff yourselves with turkey and mince pies and then settle back for an afternoon spent watching the Queen's speech and the annual *Doctor Who* Christmas Special. Merry Christmas everyone!

26: The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo



While we're not usually keen on US remakes of foreign language films, the presence of *HCC*-favourite David Fincher behind the camera has us excited about this one. Find out how it measures up when it hits UK cinemas today
www.sonypictures.co.uk

26: Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol
Another hotly-anticipated Boxing Day UK cinema release comes in the form of this fourth *Mission: Impossible* flick, which marks the live-action directorial debut of Brad '*The Incredibles*' Bird.
www.paramountpictures.co.uk

→ JANUARY

02: Frankenhooker



This delightful schlock comedy – about a young man building a new body for his girlfriend (who died in a freak lawnmower accident) from the parts of prostitutes he murders – gets the deluxe Arrow Video Blu-ray treatment in the UK today. We can't wait.
www.arrowfilms.co.uk

10: 2012 International CES
Time for the entire AV industry to decamp to Las Vegas once again for the world's biggest annual CE trade show. As usual, *HCC* will be there sampling all the red-hot tech.
www.cesweb.org

12: HCC #204
Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands today, packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and full-on software reviews

Sky Movies gets hooked up

Finding films is made easier with new website and iPhone app

From Blu-ray to DVD, streaming to Video on Demand, the home cinema fan has more services and formats to turn to than ever before when it comes to sourcing movies. But this incredible level of choice brings its own problem in actually finding the film you want to watch. This is why Sky Movies has unveiled a new website and app to help guide customers to the content they're looking for.'

The existing Sky website currently brings in around 10 million page impressions a month, but as skymovies.com editor Richard Phippen points out, 'That works great for Sky Media, and in terms of promoting Sky Movies the site works, but it isn't prioritised on Sky Movies'. Hence the development of a dedicated website, the aim of which 'is putting the films front and centre and saying this is the kind of stuff you can get if you subscribe to Sky Movies'.

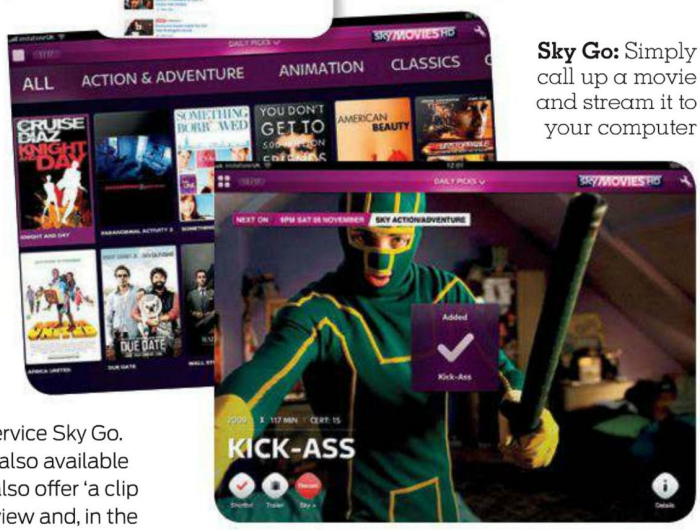


Richard Phippen: 'The biggest issue we face is customers finding the content they want'



Crucially, Phippen also claims there's some very deep metadata powering the system. 'We're going right down to things like "Films set in London" or "Films set in New York" to help people find their way through the maze of movies we've got.' And when you find the movie on the site, providing you're an existing subscriber, you can simply press Play and watch the film immediately on your computer via the sat-caster's online TV service Sky Go. Remote Record functionality is also available and Phippen states that it will also offer 'a clip and trailer for every movie, a review and, in the near-future, user reviews and user ratings' that will build on the brand's social media links.

The design of the new website and several of the features are replicated on the new Sky Movies app, now available for iPhone and iPad users. 'The app does what the top-half of the website does' according to Phippen, and while you can't watch films over it yet, he believes this function will be added soon as part of the second phase of development. An Android app is also in the works, but due to some design complications, this won't arrive until early 2012.



Sky Go: Simply call up a movie and stream it to your computer

Taking control



Priced around £1,700, the RSP-1572 is audio specialist Rotel's newest high-end 7.1-channel home cinema processor/preamp. Described by Rotel as a 'sophisticated AV control centre' the 3D-ready powerhouse features Digital Signal Processing (DSP) and Parametric EQ. The AV behemoth also offers Faroudja DCDi Cinema video processing tech, six HDMI inputs/two outputs (one with Audio Return Channel), a wireless Bluetooth dongle, front-mounted USB-input and three additional zone outputs for composite video and analogue audio.
www.rotel.com

HD media box



Dutch home automation specialist Eminent has unleashed what it describes as its 'most advanced media player' yet, the limited edition EM7285 (although the company seems reticent to confirm just how 'limited' it is). Distributed in the UK via EntaTech, the £190 media player supports Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA lossless audio, plus a variety of HD video codecs including MKV, H.264 and VC-1. Connective options include Gigabit LAN, wireless N networking and USB 3.0, plus the unit also offers the ability to connect a hard drive via a 3.5in SATA bay.
www.eminent-online.com

Budget LED



Best known in the UK for its novelty TVs (everything from crabs to footballs) Hannspree continues to develop more traditional screens as well, such as its new SE series of LED Full HD TVs. Claiming to offer 'the perfect combination of features, style and price-tag', the SE series delivers an ultra-thin profile, a trio of HDMI inputs and an integrated digital tuner. While it lacks the Smart TV features of most of its rivals, it does deliver on price, with the initial 40in model costing just £400. A 32in model is set to follow in January.
www.hannspree.com/eu

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Q300 5.1 System, What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision, August 2011

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2011

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www.kef.com

HorlaMags.net



DX-1 HCP

5.1 SYSTEM

Stylish, compact and eminently affordable, the new DX-1 HCP home cinema speaker system takes its design cues from the famous, multi-award winning Diamond 10.1 speakers. DX-1's sleek design packs a lot into a package which is beautifully discreet and easy to accommodate in the home.

DX-1 HCP consists of four satellite speakers standing just 19cm tall, plus an equally diminutive, but dynamic, centre speaker and a powerful, compact, active subwoofer, all built and finished to an exceptionally high standard and available in high-gloss white or black.

Delivering exhilarating detail and amazing sonic scale for such small speakers, the Wharfedale DX-1 HCP handles music and movie soundtracks with equal aplomb. Truly, this is one home cinema package that is small, yet perfectly formed.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

★★★★★

Wharfedale DX-1 HCP

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, Awards 2011

IAG House, Sovereign Court, Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 6XU, UK
Tel: +44(0)1480 447700 Fax: +44(0)1480 431767 www.wharfedale.co.uk

Wharfedale

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...

News x10



1 Say bye-bye to cheap DVDs

The UK government has announced that it will be closing the loophole that allows the cheap import of DVDs and Blu-rays from the Channel Islands to the UK. This means that, from April 1, 2012, the likes of Amazon and Play.com will no longer be able to benefit from the tax relief they get from discs brought in from the Channel Islands and the savings this allows them to pass on to consumers. Boo.

2 Samsung gets Googled

Despite a fairly rocky start that saw Logitech brand it a 'big mistake', Google TV refuses to go away. Samsung's president of digital media business Yoon Book-keun has stated that the company is currently in talks about producing its own Google TV hardware in 2012.

3 OLED race heats up

While the London Olympics don't get underway until 2012, a technology race connected to the event is rumoured to be well underway. Both LG and Samsung are said to be competing with one another to have 55in OLED TVs available on the world market in time to showcase the sporting event.

4 Comet super sale

Electrical retail chain Comet has been sold off for just two-quid! Anglo-French owner Kesa has sold the ailing chain to a private equity firm that plans to keep Comet as a going concern for at least 18 months. However some of the 250 stores are expected to close under pre-existing plans.

5 Warner loves LOVEFiLM

Online rental service LOVEFiLM has signed a multi-year deal with Warner Bros. to stream the studio's films to UK customers. The move is clearly a response to the news that rival service Netflix is coming to the UK in 2012 and has already been signing deals with the likes of MGM and Lionsgate.

6 Year of the Interface

The next evolution of Smart TV tech will revolve around the control interface, according to Consumer Electronics Association chief economist and director of research Shawn DuBravac. Speaking at London's CES Unveiled event, DuBravac claimed that 2012 would be the 'Year of the Interface' with a greater emphasis on voice and gesture control.

7 Bargain blockbusters

UK rental chain Blockbuster has launched a 99p rental price on 'literally thousands of films' in an effort to help stave off the threat of rival streaming and VOD services. Blockbuster commercial director Gerry Butler describes the price-point as 'a welcome break for families looking for entertainment but not looking to pay over the odds for it'.

8 Blocked?

Sky, Virgin Media and TalkTalk have been asked to follow in the footsteps of BT and block their customers from accessing the pirate website Newzbin2. BT was ordered by the High Court to implement the ban in a landmark ruling in July.

9 TV shake-up

Sony is the latest Japanese TV giant to feel the bite of the current economic situation. The company has posted losses of Y27bn (£225m) in Q2 of the current financial year, down from a Y31.1bn (£266m) profit in the same period the previous year. Unsurprisingly, Sony plans to respond with a radical shake-up of its loss-making TV division, with slimmer product ranges and a greater focus on the higher-end of the LCD market. Which sounds like a good idea to us.

10 Philips closes the deal

Some seven months after the deal was originally announced Philips and TPV have finally signed the joint-venture agreement that hands over operational control and a 70 per cent stake in Philips' TV business to the Hong Kong-based TV maker.


TPV Ambilight: coming soon?

Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Bad movies slammed

Universal Studios boss Rob Meyer recently railed against several of his company's films including *Wolfman* and *Babe 2* ('two of the sh**tiest movies we put out), *Land of the Lost* ('just crap') and even *Cowboys & Aliens* ('a mediocre movie'). He did admit to liking *United 93* and *Scott Pilgrim*... though.

Hollywood Who



Director David Yates has stated that he is currently developing a *Doctor Who* film in conjunction with BBC Worldwide, but that the show 'needs a radical transformation to take it into the bigger arena' and they are putting the current TV series aside and will 'start from scratch'.

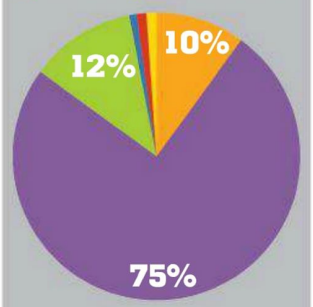
Cold-blooded killer

Martin Scorsese is in talks to direct crime thriller *The Snowman* for Working Title, based on the best-selling novel by Norwegian author Jo Nesbro. Matthew Michael Carnahan is on scripting duties, having previously worked on the upcoming zombie adaptation *World War Z*.

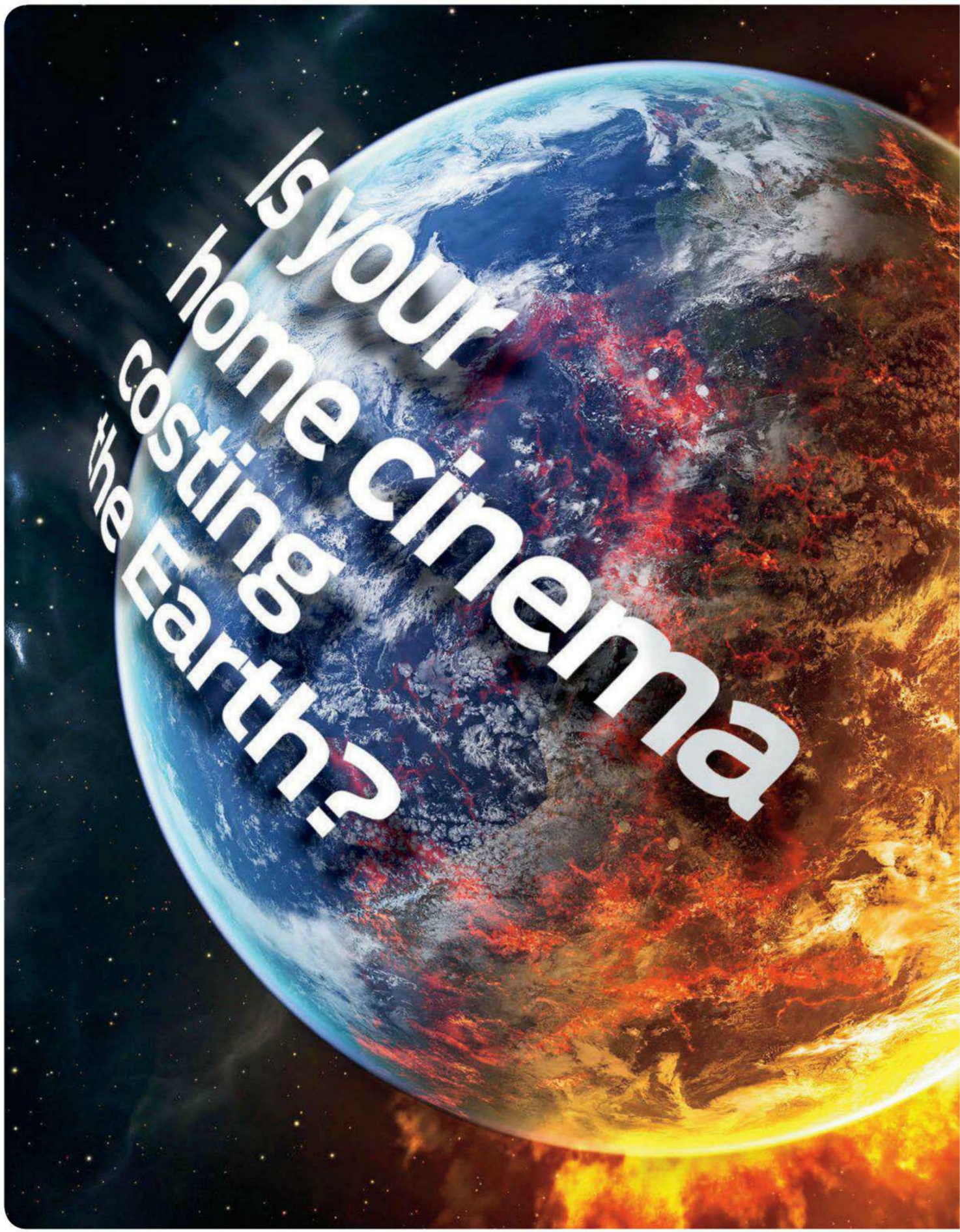
We asked...

How many subwoofers are in your home cinema?

None
One
Two
Three: 1%
Four: 1%
I've lost count: 1%



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action


Is your
home cinema
costing
the Earth?



Running a 'green' home cinema isn't just about saving the planet – it could save you money too. **Adrian Justins** finds out how

Home cinema has never been a particularly cheap hobby, and thanks to rising energy prices, the costs of running a TV screen/ projector, multichannel amplifier, Blu-ray deck and PVR have never been higher.

The Energy Savings Trust reckons that entertainment equipment accounts for about 20 per cent of most household electricity bills, but it's not just our wallets that are taking a battering – the environment is at risk from the increasing demand for cutting-edge consumer electronics.

Every electrical item in your home makes an unwelcome contribution to the amount of CO_2 in the earth's atmosphere, much of which is caused by inefficient design and manufacturing processes. Some manufacturers are also guilty of using hazardous chemicals that cause pollution.

Thankfully, most home cinema brands are actively addressing these issues and energy-efficient kit is becoming more common. The use of LED backlights, for example, means many TVs are now less power-hungry than CCFL and plasma models, and LED-lit screens typically consume 75 per cent less power than the CRT hulks of yesteryear. The big guns of AV all claim to have made great strides in several areas: improving the efficiency of their products, reducing wastage and eliminating the use of harmful chemicals such as mercury and retardants in their manufacture, while adopting greener methods of packaging and distribution.

Sony, for example, has recently developed a new plastic called SoRPlas, which is 99 per cent composed from used DVDs and TV optical sheets, and has the highest proportion of recycled material of any plastic in the world. Its production process cuts CO_2 emissions by almost 80 per cent



Sony's KDL-22EX310 is partly made from recycled DVDs – and probably HD DVDs, too

Take charge

Reusable power packs do their eco best



Even your remote control can be made greener. US company iGo has introduced rechargeable AA and AA alkaline batteries, a low-cost, environmentally friendly alternative to disposable batteries that will save you money and reduce landfill waste.

The iGo Green Rechargeable Alkaline Batteries will start saving customers money after only two recharging cycles, and can be recharged up to 40 times. The only non-toxic rechargeable line of batteries available on the market, the iGo Greens can carry their charge for up to seven years, unlike Ni-Cad and Ni-Mh cell batteries which self-discharge in less than 90 days.

They're available in AA and AAA sizes at £8 for a four-pack and £13 for an eight-pack, but an iGo Green Charger must be used for recharging purposes and costs £16 – although it does come with a four-pack of AA batteries. Also available is a two-way USB charger, complete with two AA batteries, for £13.

BURNING EARTH: © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/CHRISTIAN MILLER

Be very afraid...

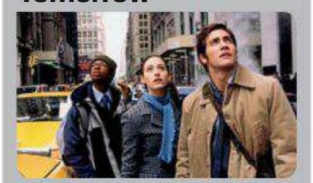
Could these eco-fear movies come true?*

Waterworld



Kevin Costner gets wet in this tale of melted polar ice caps and questionable science

The Day After Tomorrow



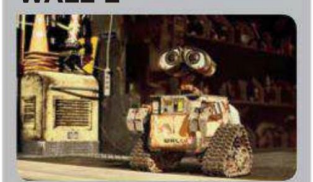
In Roland Emmerich's flick, global warming leads to massive snow storms and CGI wolves

Mad Max 2



Energy shortages have turned regular Aussie chaps into gangs of leather-clad murderous bikers

WALL-E



Pixar predicts a future where the planet is awash with rubbish and the human race has fled

The Happening



Fed up with our littering ways, the Earth's flora fights back by secreting a suicide-inducing toxin

*probably not

compared with conventional virgin plastics, and SoRPlas itself is claimed to be more durable and more easily recycled. The KDL-22EX310 is Sony's first TV on sale in the UK to be built using SoRPlas.

Then there's UK outfit HiWave Technologies, which recently won an e-Legacy Environmental Design Award for its energy-efficient consumer audio amplifier integrated circuit. The chip improves amp efficiency in consumer audio products by up to 2,000 per cent, and is so effective that a wireless loudspeaker can run for six months on a single battery charge. Normal audio amps use up to 20x the number of batteries over their lifetime to deliver similar performance.

But, for the green-minded consumer seeking to buy a new TV or amplifier, choosing a product that takes into account the eco-credentials of the manufacturer is no easy task. Scrutiny by Greenpeace has shown that many electronics companies regularly fail to meet certain promised targets, so discovering which manufacturers are planet-friendly, and which are foes, is a challenge.

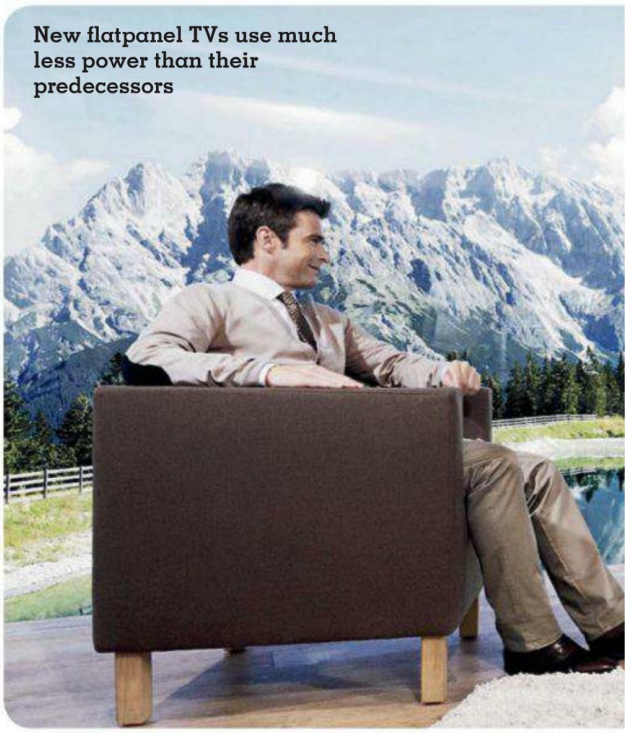
There is no universal standard by which all manufacturers are judged, but the bigger ones tend to publish a variety of information, often online. But smaller companies sometimes offer only generic statements about operating with the best interests of the planet at heart.

The most obvious way in which consumers can glean information about a company or its product's eco credentials is through the use of instantly recognisable labels such as the EU Eco Label and the European Energy Label (see box out, opposite). The latter has for years has been compulsory on white goods such as refrigerators and washing machines, but as of December 2011, it is a legal requirement for all TV screens to display one. The actual power consumption of a TV varies according to the brightness setting being used (as our labs tests show), but the Energy Label at least enables consumers to make simple comparisons. The label may well be bad news for power-hungry screens, especially plasmas, which typically consume around 300W for a 46in screen, against 150W for an LCD and 80W for an LED model. **Unfortunately, you're unlikely to find an Energy Label on any home cinema products other than TVs.**

How big is your footprint?

Energy consumption affects your monthly electricity bill, but it also plays a large part in a product's carbon emissions (unless the power source is zero-emission such as nuclear energy or wind power), but according to the Carbon Trust, usage only accounts for about half of an item's carbon footprint. The balance comes from emissions during production, distribution and decommissioning (after disposal).

Until recently, there had been no point-of-sale information about the carbon footprint of any consumer electronic product, but the Carbon Reduction Label, which is administered by the Carbon Trust, has appeared on 6,000 other types of goods across the globe including food products. The label is only awarded to companies that have shown commitment to CO_2 reduction with verification by the Carbon Trust.



New flatpanel TVs use much less power than their predecessors

LG has just become the first TV brand to be awarded the Carbon Trust label for its 47LW5500-ZE and 47LW550T-ZE TVs. Although not mandatory to show a product's actual footprint, LG's badge proclaims that these two sets emit 17g CO_2 per hour of use (which adds up to 0.025 tonnes per year). This factors in the entire lifetime of the product from factory to store, to living room and finally to recycling centre. The usage figure is based on typical UK power consumption, not simply the best-case scenario, so will vary according to how hard the TV is driven and what energy tariff is being used.

There is no compulsion for a company to apply for a Carbon Reduction label as Richard Johnstone, Head of Certification admits: 'LG are ahead of the game, but it's early days for TVs, and we expect its peers to come forward and do the same.' There are other brands in the pipeline, but the number of products showing carbon reduction tendencies will need to grow exponentially if home cinema buyers are to get anything meaningful from the scheme.



Belkin's Conserve Smart AV plug also protects against power surges

Another TV that grabbed headlines when it was launched at IFA in September is Philips' 46PFL6806 Econova screen, which won the 2011-12 EISA Green TV award. Philips hasn't submitted the Econova



for a Carbon Reduction Label, but it ranks as A++ in the Energy Label scheme.

Point-of-sale labelling aside, there are few tools available to simplify the quest for eco-friendly kit. The Energy Saving Trust website purports to rate gear, but is woefully out of date. By contrast, www.sust-it.net is more impressive at showing the in-use and standby consumption of all manner of electrical goods (but fails in the multichannel receiver section by listing only one model), along with typical annual running costs. It ranks products and makes it easy to compare the best and worst kit, showing the savings that can be made. What Sust-it doesn't do is consider the broader green credentials of those companies making the best-ranked kit, consumption-wise (nor does it rate each product in terms of performance, ease of use, etc).

Top performers

The best resource for discovering how well 18 of the biggest blue-chip manufacturers are doing in terms of environmental impact associated with manufacturing and distribution is probably Greenpeace's Guide to Greener Electronics.

Philips, Samsung and Panasonic are the highest performing companies producing home cinema kit, but none has an impeccable record for meeting targets or voicing support for restrictions on hazardous chemicals. Meanwhile, Sharp has the six best-performing 40in LED screens on Sust-it, but is criticised by Greenpeace for failing to show support for improvements to the revised EU Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive, and for issuing confusing green procurement guidelines and a list of substances document that no longer presents criteria for identifying future substances for elimination.

Clearly, there is no easy way for a consumer to get the full picture about the impact of either a product or a brand on the ecology. Information, such as is available, is disparate and often difficult to verify, but at least sites such as Sust-it.net and Greenpeace provide facts and figures relating to the more prominent companies.

For those who aren't in the market for new products, there are a number of ways to reduce power consumption and carbon emissions from an existing setup. These range from switching off at the mains wherever possible or using an energy-saving socket (such as Belkin's Conserve range) that automatically stops drawing power when not needed, to using your TV's built-in tuner whenever possible rather than a set-top box.

With rising energy costs and the proliferation of domestic kit, there has never been a greater imperative for reducing power consumption, to say nothing of minimising its effect on the planet. At least the consumer electronics industry is working at getting its 'green' house in order, and the development of breakthrough products such as Sony's SoRPlas and Hi-Wave's energy-efficient audio amplifier chip give cause for optimism.

Add it up

Exactly how much is your cinema costing you to run?



Everyone's home cinema is different, so working out how much money you're spending powering it is a job for yourself. This is where power meters come in handy. Our favourite is the Wattson (pictured), which has an easy-to-read display showing your home's total electricity usage in watts or cost, making it simple to see the effect of a single device. It'll have you prowling the house switching different things on and off in no time. Useful and fun.

For a rough idea, though, an example setup, consisting of a 55in LED TV, Blu-ray deck/PVR and AVR and active subwoofer, used for four hours a day, every day, would eat up around 500kW annually, equating to a bill of about £100. But you'll also be saving power if you like to watch your movies with all the lights off...

Know your labels

Current point-of-sale guides for buyers



The EU Eco-Label

In order to display this label a product must meet the following criteria:

- Low power consumption during operation
- Stand-by consumption less than 1W
- Long lifetime of the device
- No use of certain chemicals
- Use of materials which can easily be recycled
- Availability of electronic replacement parts for a period of at least seven years after discontinuation of production

The EU Energy Label

Every TV must now show its energy rating alongside figures for power consumption when switched on and the total annual figure in KWh, based on four hours use every day of the year. An eco-switch icon indicates the presence of a Zero power switch (which turns the set completely off rather than into standby). As more and more screens become A rated, it will be harder to distinguish products which are more energy efficient, so the label will evolve to include A+, A++ and A+++ ratings.

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HOME CINEMA Choice

MOVIE AWARDS 2011



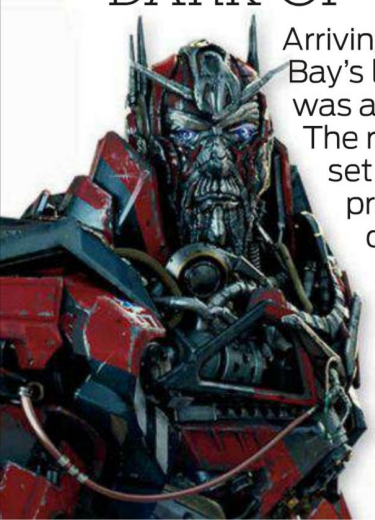
From *Tron: Legacy 3D* and *Sucker Punch* to *Star Wars* and *Jurassic Park*, it's been a record-breaking year for our beloved Blu-ray format. But which discs are most deserving of a spin in your home cinema system? Join us as we celebrate the very best releases of the last 12 months (and name and shame the worst...). Then you'll know exactly which titles to add to your collection...>

BEST PICTURE QUALITY



Winner

TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON



Arriving on a barebones dual-layer plater, Michael Bay's latest two-and-a-half-hour robo-blockbuster was able to really stretch its legs on the Blu-ray. The resulting high-bitrate AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode set a new video benchmark for the high-definition presentation. The clarity, detailing and vibrancy of the image is nothing less than breathtaking, ensuring that every nut and bolt is visible as the film's rival robot factions beat chunks out of one another. A flawless, reference quality experience from start to finish.

Also nominated

TRON: LEGACY

Razor-sharp digital visuals combine with IMAX imagery for a truly breathtaking vision of cyberspace on this high-definition platter.

TREE OF LIFE

It might seem like an unlikely home cinema favourite, but Terrence Malick's moving hymn to life is one of the best-looking discs you'll see.

BEN-HUR: 3-DISC UCE

This stunning restoration doesn't just elevate this 1958 classic to new visual heights, it also outclasses most modern films in picture quality.

BEST TV BOXSET



Winner

THE TWILIGHT ZONE: SEASON ONE

Rod Serling's legendary anthology series received a stunning makeover earlier this year. Remastered from the original film negatives the HD visuals put many films to shame, and the set is loaded with fascinating extras.

Also nominated

TREME: SEASON ONE
Stunning lossless 5.1 audio makes the most of the show's musical roots.
SPARTACUS: BLOOD AND SAND
Swords, sandals and sex. Smashing.
FRINGE: SEASON THREE
Equal parts sci-fi chills and HD thrills.

Funniest Film

The Other Guys



Despite stiff competition from the likes of *Bridesmaids* and *Your Highness*, no film provided more laughs-per-minute than this hysterical action movie spoof starring Mark Wahlberg and Will Ferrell.

Mixing the sharp with the downright silly, the film dissects the modern cop movie to delicious effect. As for the best bit? It has to be the shocking fate of the super-cop duo played by The Rock and Samuel L Jackson.

BEST ANIMATION



Winner

RANGO

What's this? Can it be that an animation by somebody other than Disney has won this award? You'd better believe it. This homage to the Western is a wonderful film and – just as importantly – an utterly astonishing hi-def experience.

Also nominated

AKIRA
Definitive anime classic with astonishing remixed sonics.
THE LION KING 3D: DIAMOND EDITION
Disney's best-loved film is a real king of the hi-def jungle.
CHICO & RITA
A moving reminder that animation isn't just for kids.

BEST WORLD CINEMA



Winner

METROPOLIS

Featuring 25mins of recently re-discovered footage taken from a 16mm print found in Brazil, this is the most complete version of Fritz Lang's 1927 sci-fi classic ever seen. Another must-have disc from Eureka's Masters of Cinema range.

Also nominated

13 ASSASSINS
A superb disc for Takeshi Miike's great Kurasawa homage.
AMER
Artistic horror throwback with bonus shorts for fans.
RIFIFI
A beautiful restoration of the French crime classic.

BEST AUDIO QUALITY



Winner

SUCKER PUNCH: EXTENDED CUT

One of the most accomplished and inventive soundtracks you'll ever have the pleasure of running through your home cinema system, *Sucker Punch*'s DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix is the sort of soundtrack that you'll return to again and again, uncovering new details and intricacies each time you do. From action scenes to a restored musical number, *Sucker Punch* always sounds as good as its leading ladies look, serving up a *tour-de-force* of surround effects with remarkable tonality and awe-inspiring range.



Also nominated

TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON

If there's one thing Michael Bay does well, it's mechanical mayhem – and this disc's Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mix relishes every crunching moment.

STAR WARS: THE COMPLETE SAGA

The films may stretch back across the decades, but they still sound as exciting as ever thanks to this Blu-ray set's superb DTS-HD MA 5.1 remixes.

TRON: LEGACY

A native 7.1 cinema soundtrack ensured that this Blu-ray gave audiophiles a taste of the future.

BEST SPECIAL EFFECTS



Winner

SKINNY STEVE (CAPTAIN AMERICA)

Actor Chris Evans is a strapping chap, so the filmmakers had to employ astonishing – yet utterly convincing – CG trickery to convincingly transform him into the scrawny pre-Super Soldier serum Steve Rogers we see at the start of the film.

Also nominated

HOMEMADE VISUAL EFFECTS (MONSTERS)
Is this the future of low-budget filmmaking? We hope so

CHICAGO ASSAULT (TRANSFORMERS: DOTM)
Computer-generated mayhem on an epic scale

SPRING BREAK MASSACRE (PIRANHA 3D)
Practical and CG FX combine to create great gore gags

BEST DVD EXCLUSIVE



Winner

DOCTOR WHO: DAY OF THE DALEKS – SPECIAL EDITION

As well as the usual painstaking restoration and fan-pleasing extras, this two-disc set pushed the boat out with its alternate version of the story with all-new special effects.

Also nominated

THE KINGDOM I & II: BROADCAST EDITION
Deliberately dreadful visuals, but a great DVD package

THE KILLING: SEASON ONE
Savour the hit Danish crime show in one mammoth sitting

ARCHER: SEASON ONE
This hysterical animated spy series hits the bullseye

3D BLU-RAY



Winner

TRON: LEGACY

Anybody who still harbours doubts about what 3D brings to home cinema needs only to see this disc in action. With razor-sharp IMAX visuals and native DTS-HD MA 7.1 sonics, this sci-fi action flicks creates a wholly immersive and totally compelling 3D world for you to visit.

Also nominated

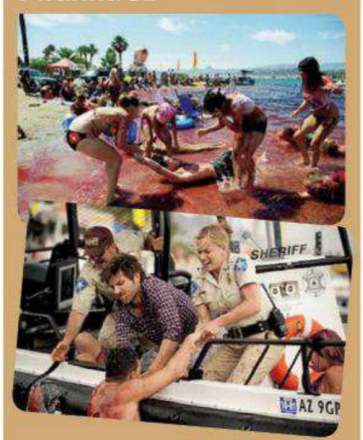
CAVE OF FORGOTTEN DREAMS
Caving documentary digs deep to uncover new depths in 3D cinema

CARS 2
A new benchmark for 3D animation

RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE
3D breathes fresh life into the undead

Kill of the Year

Piranha 3D

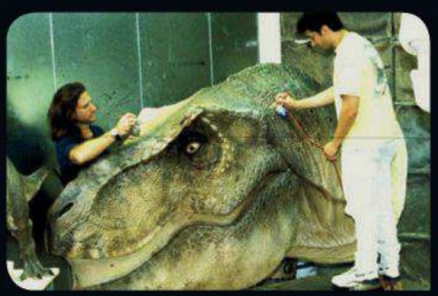


Alexandre Aja's 3D splatter-fest throws up so many spectacular death scenes that it's hard to pick just one. So we're cheating a bit and picking the entire Spring Break Massacre.

Watch in horror (and amusement) as an endless parade of party goers are ripped to pieces in exciting and inventive ways – not least the girl who gets her hair caught in a propeller and has her face ripped off, or one who literally goes to pieces while being carried out of the water. Brilliant!

EXTRA FEATURE OF THE YEAR











Winner

RETURN TO JURASSIC PARK (JURASSIC PARK TRILOGY)

Steven Spielberg's 1993 blockbuster changed the face of modern cinema, but until now had never received the kind of in-depth documentary it deserved. Created specifically for this boxset, the six-part *Return to Jurassic Park* is the detailed look at the making of the trilogy (and even the theme park ride) that fans have been dying for. Packed with rare on-set and behind-the-scenes material, it's a fascinating testament to the effort it took to bring these flicks to life. Roarsome.



Also nominated

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY (MIMIC: DIRECTOR'S CUT)

Guillermo del Toro pulls no punches in this frank dissection of what went wrong on his first Hollywood film

HEARTS OF DARKNESS (APOCALYPSE NOW)

Eleanor Coppola's film still reigns as one of the greatest behind-the-scenes documentaries ever made

U-CONTROL PICTURE-IN-PICTURE (SCARFACE)

Extensive interviews, alternate takes and comparisons with the 1932 film make for a treasure trove of info

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BEST REMASTERING



Winner

BEN HUR: 3-DISC ULTIMATE COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Warner Home Video has always prided itself on the quality of the restorations it has undertaken for its vast catalogue of Hollywood classics. But not even the strength of its outstanding previous remasters could prepare us for the wonders it worked with this Biblical epic. Created from an 8k scan of a painstaking frame-by-frame restoration of the original 65mm camera negative, this is *Ben-Hur* as its never been seen since the day the first print was struck. There's not a trace of dirt or damage to be found, and for the first time ever the colours are absolutely spot-on, as evidenced by the brilliant whites of what were formerly dirty grey horses pulling Charlton Heston's chariot.

Also nominated

TAXI DRIVER: 35TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

An immaculate restoration of Scorsese's 1976 masterpiece from Grover Crisp and his team at Sony Colourworks.

TOUCH OF EVIL: LIMITED EDITION

This Masters of Cinema set serves up five brilliantly remastered presentations of the noir classic.

APOCALYPSE NOW: 3-DISC BLU-RAY CE

The results would have been absolutely apocalyptic if this classic hadn't been restored so skillfully.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR



Winner

VILLAGE TRAP (13 ASSASSINS)

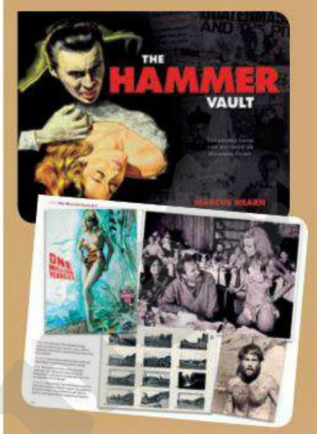
Takashi Miike's samurai film closes with an audacious 45-minute action sequence, where the titular 13 assassins take on more than 200 soldiers in a maze of small village streets that have been turned into a series of death traps. A relentless of cavalcade of choreographed carnage.

Also nominated

THE ROCK VS VIN DIESEL (FAST FIVE)
Action icons rediscover their roots!
THOR VS DESTROYER (THOR)
The year's best superhero brawl!
BABYDOLL VS GIANT SAMURAI (SUCKER PUNCH)
This hot chick kicks all kinds of ass!

Book of the Year

The Hammer Vault



The ultimate coffee table tome for any serious horror fan, this collection of 'Treasures from the Archives of Hammer Films' serves up one wonderful surprise after another.

Whether it's a Milk Marketing Board publicity shot of the Mummy enjoying 'his daily pinta' or the reproductions of Tom Chantrell's lurid poster concepts, this mammoth hardback feels like the ultimate Special Features package for the legendary UK studio's output.

DISC FAIL



Winner

IRONCLAD

The UK arm of Warner Home Video came a cropper with its initial *Ironclad* Blu-ray thanks to the decision to release it cropped from 2.35:1 to 1.78:1. And when Warner finally reissued the disc, the contrast levels were artificially boosted.

Also nominated

STRAW DOGS
Controversial classic with the brightness dialed up to 11.
THE KING'S SPEECH
Nothing better than 1080i for the year's biggest Brit-flick.
SCREAM TRILOGY
Aging transfers and a lack of extras will make you scream!

GAME OF THE YEAR



Winner

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

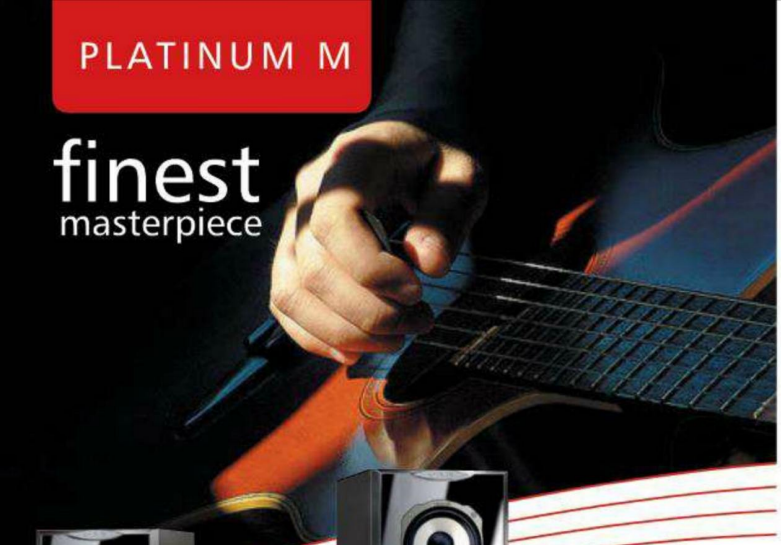
The Dark Knight's latest videogame is every bit as thrilling as his last cinematic outing. And with its stunning graphics, immersive Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtrack and optional 3D mode, *Arkham City* is tailor-made for a home cinema environment.

Also nominated

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION
The smartest game you'll play all year. Sci-fi at its best.
L.A. NOIRE
The closest we've come to a genuine interactive movie.
DIRT3
The best big-screen adrenaline rush money can buy.

PLATINUM M

finest masterpiece





HI-FI WORLD
"Real fidelity at an affordable price" - 5/5 PLATINUM M4

HOME CINEMA Choice BEST BUY
"Absolutely fantastic" CHROMIUM STYLE 5.1

hi-fi news HIGHLY COMMENDED
"Tuneful bass ... Tweeter scintillates ... Impressively built and finished off for the price" - ORKAN VIII

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Hi-Fi Choice
"Sweet and smooth" 4.5/5 - ALTAN VIII

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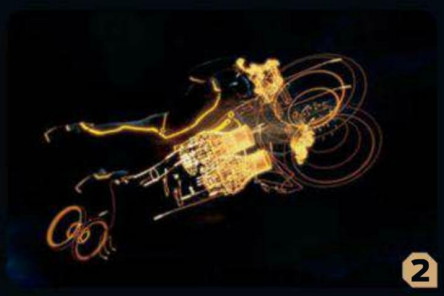


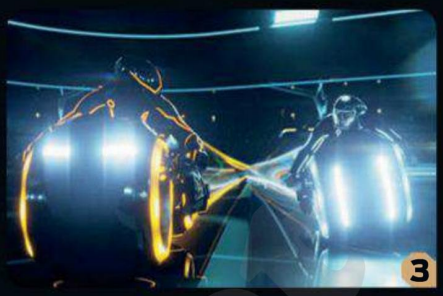
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BEST DEMO SEQUENCE



















Winner

TRON: LEGACY – LIGHT CYCLE BATTLE



If you want to really put your home cinema system through its paces, then there's no better sequence to use than this one. Delivering AV fireworks from the get-go (quite literally in this case, as they explode around you in the sequence's opening moments), the ensuing light cycle battle delivers a mind-blowing AV demo in both 2D and 3D, serving up an unbeatable mix of super-sharp, exquisitely detailed 1.78:1 AVC/MVC 1080p visuals and dynamic DTS-HD MA 7.1 sonics that follow the CG vehicles as they race past.

Also nominated

SUCKER PUNCH – TRAIN RAID

The combination of eye-popping visuals and intricate sound design make this a real BD showcase.

TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON – FREEWAY CHASE

Michael Bay does what he does best – conjuring up sensational action that pushes your system to its limits.

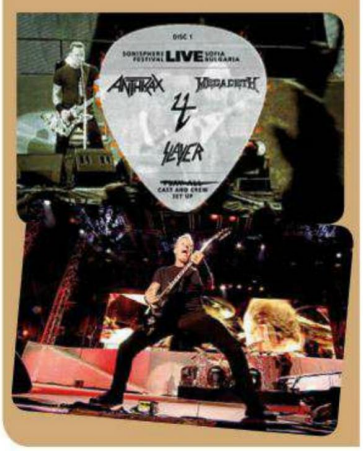
SUPER 8 – TRAIN CRASH

If it's raw, unbridled audio power you're looking for then look no further than this rail disaster.

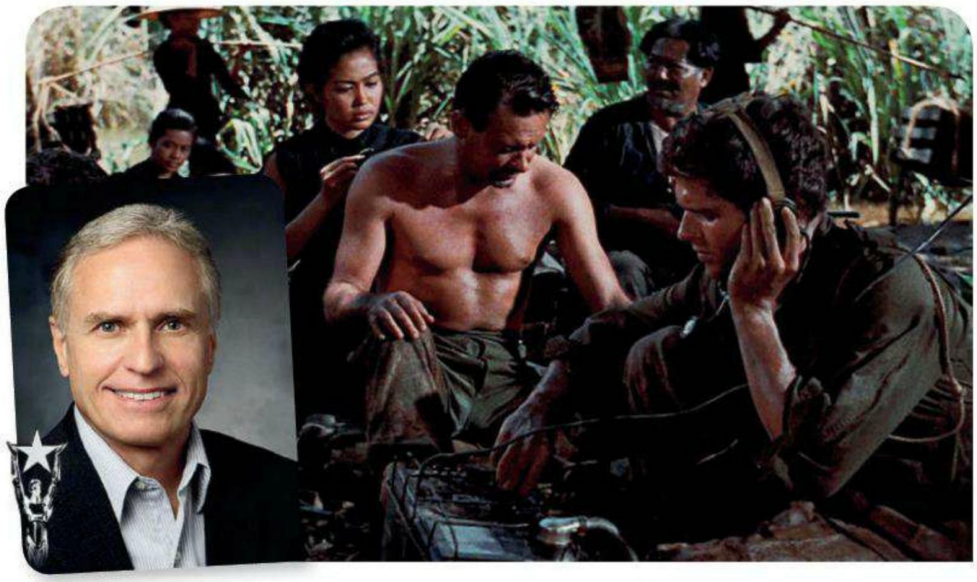
Music Disc of the Year

The Big 4: Live from Sofia, Bulgaria

This two-disc live music Blu-ray is a cut above the rest, partly because of its pin-sharp visuals and spine-tingling DTS-HD MA mix, but mainly because of its subject matter. Witness Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer and Anthrax team up for the ultimate thrash metal concert – it's raw, exciting and will have even the most po-faced music fan throwing devil's horns. And the behind-the-scenes doc is a blast.



ICON OF THE YEAR



Winner

GROVER CRISP

Working with his team at Sony Colorworks, Grover Crisp has overseen some of the year's best restorations (including *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* above) and is a passionate proponent of both Blu-ray and 4K digital cinema. He's currently overseeing the long-awaited *Lawrence of Arabia* restoration, due to hit Blu-ray in 2012.

Also nominated

JUSTIN LIN
Action director and home cinema fan who designs his films for Blu-ray

MARVEL STUDIOS
Home to cinema's hottest heroes

OLIVER STONE
CES 2011's biggest Blu-ray supporter

LABEL OF THE YEAR



Winner

SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Whether it's a modern blockbuster or a catalogue classic, Sony Pictures delivers a standard of AV quality that the other Hollywood majors struggle to match. And if that wasn't enough, it also continues to lead the way for 3D Blu-ray.

Also nominated

EUREKA!
Nobody treats world cinema titles better on Blu-ray

WALT DISNEY HOME ENTERTAINMENT
Its Diamond Editions set new standards for 2D animation

STUDIOCANAL UK
The past year has been a stunner for this mini-major

BEST USE OF 3D



Winner

PIRANHA 3D

Kelly Brook in 3D... Do we need to say any more? How about Kelly Brook and 'adult' movie star Riley Steele indulging in a spot of skinny-dipping? If you can't grasp why this is the best use of 3D ever, then you might want to check your pulse.

Also nominated

CAVE OF FORGOTTEN DREAMS
Every shot inside the cave is a revolution in 3D

THE HOLE
You'll really get the feel for its bottomless nature!

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Disney's digital ballroom is a true work of stereoscopic art

DISC OF THE YEAR



Winner

STAR WARS: THE COMPLETE SAGA

Could any *Star Wars* boxset ever have completely lived up to fanboy expectations? Probably not. But despite a few niggles (*The Phantom Menace*'s DNR'd visuals and the lack of original DVD extras being the most obvious), this eight-disc set gets extremely close with its electrifying 5.1 audio remixes and the surprising depth of its bonus features. Undoubtedly the biggest release in the format's history, the Force is definitely strong with this Blu-ray boxset!



Also nominated

TRON: LEGACY

The reference-quality imagery and native 7.1-channel sonics make this the perfect sci-fi treat for home cinema enthusiasts

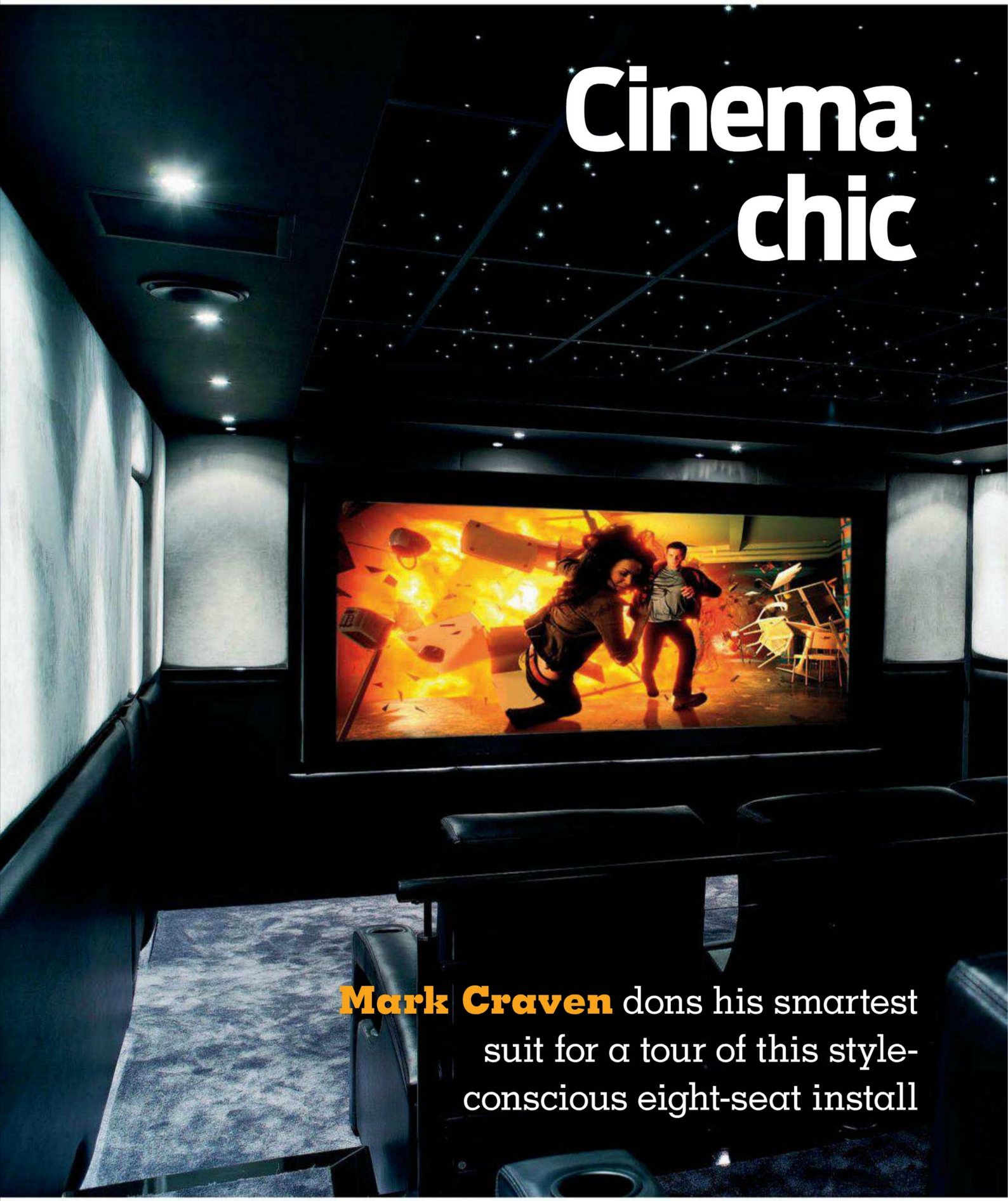
BEN-HUR: 3-DISC UCE

The ultimate Hollywood epic is given a new lease of life thanks to an awe-inspiring restoration and staggering collection of extras

RANGO

2011's best animated film is also one of the best-looking Blu-rays we've seen all year. Gather up a posse and track down a copy right away!

Cinema chic



Mark Craven dons his smartest suit for a tour of this style-conscious eight-seat install



→ Kit Checklist

Screen Research: 2.40:1 X-Mask 2 projector screen
Triad: 3 x Gold 6/LCR; 6 x InWall Silver/4 surround; 2 x InWall Silver/15 subwoofers
Digital Projection: MVision LED projector
Lumagen: XS Video Processor
Audipak: Mirror system
Audyssey: MultEQ sound equalizer
Triad: 2 x RackAmp 600 DSP
Fortress: 8 x custom-made cinema seats
Crowson: 8 x transducers fitted to seating
Sherbourn: 2/160 amplifier
Sherbourn: PT7020A processor
Sherbourn: 5/200 amplifier
Crestron: TPMC-3X Handheld Touch Panel Controller-Gloss Black
Kaleidescape: KServer-1500 1U; KPlayer M500-B; KVault-10
Sky: Sky+HD

The room is styled to resemble a 'high-end boutique hotel'

Face it – your home cinema system may offer spine-tingling sonics and hi-def visuals to die for, but until you've got rid of the cable clutter, the mountain of plasticky remote controls and the BD-strewn carpet, some of your friends won't be impressed. The owners of this gorgeous theatre room in North London won't have that problem, though...

Done as part of a multiroom makeover by professional installers Smartcomm, the criteria for the room included, obviously, Full HD movie playback and surround sound, but seating for up to eight people and a style and decor that you would expect from a 'high-end boutique hotel or nightclub'.

Achieving this was made easier by the owners already having an idea of what they were looking for. And the resulting room, which features hidden entrance doors, glass-infilled handrails and leather and alacantra acoustic panels, certainly looks more five-star hotel than £15-a-night hostel.

Out of sight

The sleek look is helped by having most of the electronics squirrelled away in a boot room; Middle Atlantic racking stores the Sherbourn amps and processor, Kaleidescape server and Sky HD box. In fact, all that's needed in the cinema room is the projector and speakers.

The latter are all from US brand Triad. Original plans featured on-wall speakers, but the final decision was to use in-walls for the surrounds and twin subwoofers and to have the front stage mounted behind the acoustically transparent screen. Even the reference-grade Digital Projection PJ is tucked away; rather than ceiling-mount it, Smartcomm used a mirror-kit, where a panel in the ceiling opens up and the picture is reflected through electrically-driven mirrors. This also helps reduce the impact of the PJ's operating noise.

In keeping with the look of the room, the system is endowed with some high-end control, too. The entrance is marshalled by an Ekey finger scanner (making this once of the nicest 'panic rooms' around...) and a Crestron wi-fi TPMC-3X touchpanel lets the owners take charge of the intelligent lighting system (which includes the seemingly ubiquitous 'star' ceiling, and cue up a movie.

Then the fun begins...



Room essentials

A Hidden talents
The Digital Projection MVision LED projector is fitted in a ceiling compartment, with its image fired at the projector screen courtesy of a mirror kit. It is accessible from the room, of course, should it need maintenance

B Stars in their eyes
Part of the Crestron-controlled intelligent lighting system is this fibre optic 'star ceiling'

C Movies on demand
This Middle Atlantic rack powers the whole house – not just the cinema room. That explains the multitude of Kaleidescape players and servers present

D Sub power
Each of the Triad subwoofers is powered by its own rack-mounted 500W amp

E Ready to rumble
The cinema seating was custom-made by Fortress – and all are fitted with a tactile transducer

F First draft
The original CG renders feature on-wall speakers





Serious Home Cinema



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If you're serious about your Home Entertainment, make sure you consult a dealer who really understands the latest products, who can demonstrate equipment properly and help you select what's right for your home and budget, whether it's big or small.

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THE TOP 20



> "..the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level."

Choosing a home cinema system is a potential minefield that must be negotiated with great care or safely avoided by letting experts guide you. If you want to end up with a system that, as a minimum, meets your expectations in terms of picture and sound quality, reading magazine product reviews and choosing the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys can only ever be part of the answer at best. Looking for the cheapest price and having a system delivered to your door, even with a 'knowledgeable' friend to help set it up, is a well-trodden path to disappointment.

There is a bewildering choice of components on the market today and also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D? Full 1080p capability is now the only sensible choice but the appropriate source components, such as a Blu-ray player, need to be part of the equation. The sound performance of a system is also hugely important, even more so if you will be listening to music, or music DVD's, through the same system. If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Having an amp with the right inputs for the best connectivity is essential but you will also need to decide on a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub and, crucially, where they will be sited for the best results. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

WHAT AND WHERE TO BUY

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ...**don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

GUIDE
TO BUYING HOME CINEMA

LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.
They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

BUYING OR BEING SOLD TO?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a carefully selected group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

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GETTING THE BEST DEAL

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a far better way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

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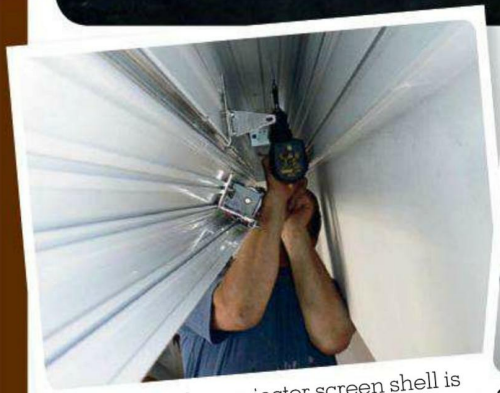
Fit for purpose

Part 3

In our DIY install build this month, **Chris Jenkins** reports on the final hardware challenges



The room was designed to incorporate both a flatscreen TV and projector



Inside job: The projector screen shell is screwed into ceiling joists, before the roll of screen fabric and motor is fitted



On a roll: The screen material arrived in some cumbersome packaging – make sure you have room for it...



Fabric fact: Screen Research's ClearPix 2 fabric is backed by black padding to improve picture performance

In previous issues you've seen how we designed and specified this mid-range home cinema room project. Now we've arrived at the delicate point of fitting the rear speakers and the projection screen casing. It's a case of 'all hands on deck', as the massive screen arrives and we start to wonder whether the ceiling will hold it...

Step 1: The screen goes in

Our first task was to secure the projection screen casing to the ceiling joists. A power supply cable runs up to the casing behind the wall, connecting to the motor, which operates the screen's trap door. The projection case is now ready to accept the screen fabric, which arrived in such a giant container that we had some difficulty manoeuvring it through the door. The fabric, Screen Research's THX-certified ClearPix2 woven material, will be lowered in front of the in-wall left/centre/right speakers without affecting their performance. The THX/ISF-certified black backing will suppress reflections behind the screen and boost the perceived contrast ratio. That's if we don't tear it while installing it!

Step 2: And then the other one...

The front-facing Definitive Technology Reference UIW RLS11 speakers were finally fitted and fixed into the timber frame, which forms part of the screen-wall. The well had been tiled with black slate, chosen to provide a stark contrast with the white walls and provide some subtle shadow effects when the system's backlight is engaged, and a plasma screen mount was fitted in the recess.

The plan was to fit Panasonic's own wall-mount for the TH-65PX600 65in TV, but in use it stood out too far from the wall. We ended up with a Future Automation PF65 mount, which is just 30mm thick and allowed the screen to sit much closer to the wall. The TV's built-in speakers would be adequate for general use when we didn't want to fire up the whole system.

Before it could be hung and secured in place, supporting the 79kg screen while we plumbed in all the connections (including HDMI, component, Scart and aerial) was a massive task (okay, there are slightly lighter plasma screens available now, but you're still looking at over 70kg in many cases). While we were doing this, we fitted Apollo LED light bars (from www.apollolighting.co.uk) behind the screen for a bit of ambient lighting. These light tubes come in a range of sizes – we went for four 24-inchers, designed to bounce light off the back of the recess to provide an Ambilight-style effect. We'd better hope they're reliable, as it's not going to be easy to move the TV to service the lights.

Step 3: Rear action

Fitting the rear speakers was the next job. Positioned either side of the projector mount, the speakers were designed to give a strongly steered effect from the side to the back of the room. There's not much point trying for infinite subtlety in a room this size; unless you have a marked transition from side to rear, you aren't really going to get the benefit of 7.1 sound.

Then it's back to the in-wall Velodyne subwoofers for their final stage, the fitting of the grille covers. While these will be the only elements of the subwoofers visible when the assembly has been completed, they prove strangely reluctant to co-operate, the metal moulding refusing to locate without an immense struggle and the help of Velodyne's UK distributor Redline. No, we weren't trying to fit them upside-down!

Step 4: Keeping it cool

If you're working on your first dedicated home cinema project, you may overlook the importance of air conditioning. But once you have a projector and an amp going in an enclosed >





Slate: The wall behind the mounted Panasonic television was lined with black slate for a contrast with the rest of the room

Tight fit: A 30mm flatscreen-mount from Future Automation keeps the plasma close to the back wall



Make it tight: Fixing the PJ to the ceiling was straightforward – our main worry was that it would fall on someone's head!



Behind the grille: The room uses two in-wall Velodyne subwoofers – and this is all you can see of them

Worldwide



Air con: With a projector and amplification being installed, a Daikin air-conditioner was fitted to keep the cinema room cool



Con air: Of course, you'll need to remember that air-con comes with an outside unit, too...



Ssshhh!: Mitsubishi's HC5000 LCD projector was chosen for its whisper-quiet operation – and HD picture quality

space, you will rapidly suffocate if you don't think about ventilation. Siting the equipment outside the room helps, but we didn't have that option.

The problem with conventional air-con, of course, is the noise it creates, so we went for a Daikin FTXG-35EV, A-rated for energy efficiency, standing just 15cm from the wall and offering an operational noise level of around 22dB in operation (about the same as many modern projectors). Of course, there's also an exterior unit to take into account, so you must consider the noise that is going to make, too. However, as the Daikin runs at only 44dB outside, it's still not a major concern. You may well find that a typical DIY warehouse-type air-con unit is a lot noisier, so choose carefully.

Step 5: And let there be dark

Having completed the Niko smart lighting system (see last issue), we realised that we could automate the curtains and tie them into the lighting. Using a bespoke aluminium track for the bay window from Goelst, we fitted an electric spur for the motor. Goelst's 6200 G-Rail track system comes with its own programmable remote control as standard, but we integrated it with the Niko system so we could open or close the curtains from the light switch. The curtains we chose were, of course, fitted with blackout backing to ensure optimum movie-viewing conditions, but as the Goelst motor can handle up to 15kg in weight it would have no trouble with them.

Step 6: Silent running

Settling on an LCD projector to preclude the possibility of fan noise from a DLP, we chose the Mitsubishi HC5000 (which has now been superseded by the HC6000). The projector is situated above the seating position – so we had to be really sure about the security of the mount. Of course, we had already run the interconnects to the projector, but for a bang-up-to-date system, probably only one HDMI and possibly one component connection would be necessary.

Step 7: Getting comfy

The final steps were carpeting and furnishing, not something you'll want to do before all the fitting work is finished. Of course, the carpet has a good deal to do with the acoustics of the room, so don't be tempted to dispense with it and go for wooden floors, as these will cause too much reflection.

As for seating, while we looked at dedicated home cinema chairs, in the end the size and price ruled them out; we needed a four-seater which would fit in the window-bay, so we turned to perennial favourite DFS. A curved Vetta electric four-seat recliner costing just over £1,000 did the job. However, even having previously removed some brickwork from the window bay, the sofa only just fitted the space.

So the job's done. The only thing left is to fire it up and see whether our careful planning and specifying has paid off!

Next issue: Our cinema room gets put through its paces – are we happy with the end result?



Lights out: The blackout curtains were fitted to a Goelst electric rail and incorporated into the smart lighting system



Baywatch: This four-seater reclining sofa just squeezed in the already-expanded bay window recess

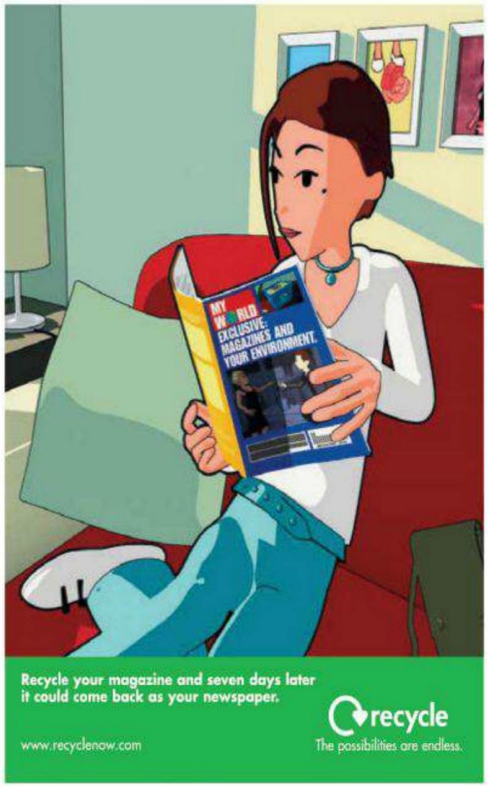
Be in the mag!

Share your system

If you're currently building a cinema room, or have just finished one and are enjoying the benefits, we want to know about it! Get in touch via letters@homecinemachoice.com and share your experience. And, if you have good quality pics of your project – be it a basement conversion or attic overhaul – you could be featured in *HCC*.

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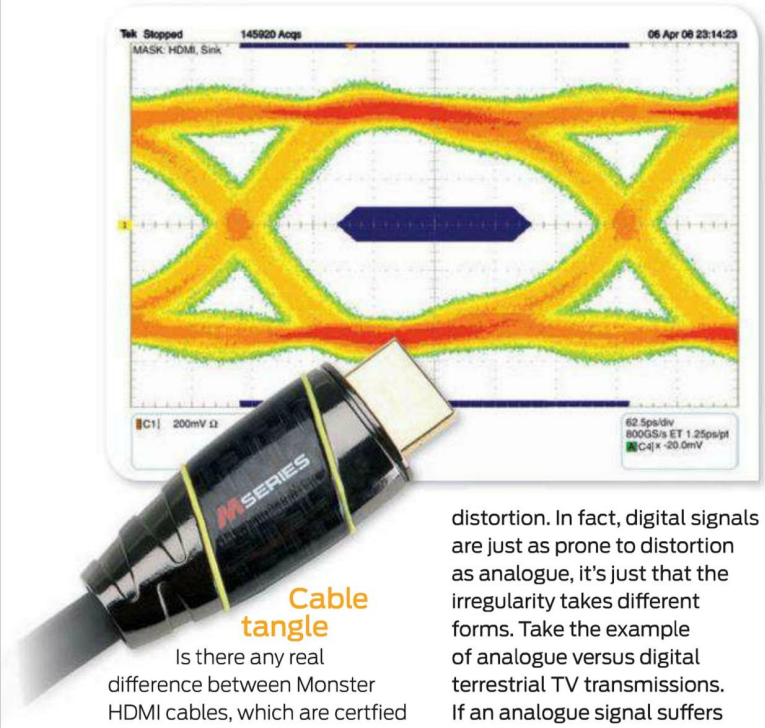
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AV Clinic



Is your sub-bass boomy, your picture peculiar or your cabling concerning? Write to **HCC** with your home cinema problems, and our team of experts will suggest the solution!



Cable tangle

Is there any real difference between Monster HDMI cables, which are certfied by ISF, and QED Reference HDMI cable? I don't know if your testing equipment could tell any difference...?
Richard Powell via e-mail

We've dealt with the subject of HDMI cable quality extensively both in the magazine and online. The suggestion that spending more money on a better cable could give more reliable results seems to drive people into an uncontrollable rage, based on the assumption that all cable manufacturers are lying scumbags determined to rip off honest, hard-working AV fans.

The fact is that it's a myth that digital signals are digital and therefore aren't prone to distortion. In fact, digital signals are just as prone to distortion as analogue, it's just that the irregularity takes different forms. Take the example of analogue versus digital terrestrial TV transmissions. If an analogue signal suffers interference, the result might be some fuzz or ghosting in the picture, but it will still be viewable. If a digital signal suffers interference, the picture might break up, or be lost altogether.

There should be no difference in picture and sound performance or system control efficiency between any HDMI cables capable of carrying an undistorted digital signal. The better engineered a cable is, the more likely it will carry an undistorted signal. There will also be improvements in mechanical reliability.

There's an extensive licensing programme for all HDMI products, and those that fail the tests shouldn't get onto the market. But there are also cheap, unlicensed, unreliable HDMI cables out there. If you're lucky, they might work without problems; if not, they may start to drop bits of data, resulting in visual information loss such as on-screen 'sparklies', and system data loss which may create communication errors between components; such as a TV failing to detect that a Blu-ray player has powered up, or failing to select the correct aspect ratio.

Problems with poor HDMI cables are more likely to arise when you have long cable runs, or extensive networks of interconnected equipment. If you just have a single 1m HDMI cable from your Blu-ray player to your TV, you're unlikely to encounter problems no matter how cheap the cable!

It is possible to measure the signal efficiency of cables, but the equipment required costs around $250,000. Certainly the difference between Monster's ISF cable and QED's Reference cable, if any, would be insignificant, and you certainly wouldn't be able to perceive it in terms of picture or sound quality. Anyone tempted to spend hundreds of pounds on HDMI cables, on the assumption that it would result in improved picture and sound, is barking up the wrong tree; but invest in good quality HDMI cables and you'll be assured of reliable operation and long life.

All-in-one fun

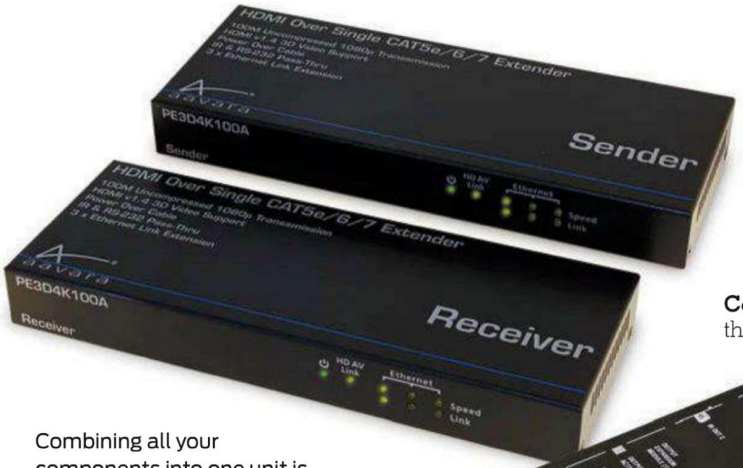
I recently bought a Samsung D7000 46in TV, and I'm now looking for a single source component to connect to it, which would contain all functions within one device to reduce space requirements.

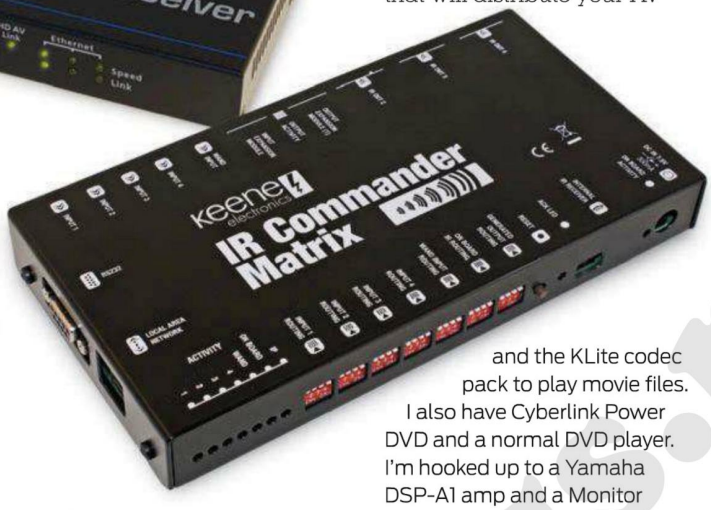
I have two existing ceiling-mount speakers, and I would like to be able to receive FM radio (and ideally DAB), play 3D Blu-rays and have an AV receiver to connect to existing and any additional speakers.

Silly though it may sound, the absolute quality of the device is not greatly important, though if one appliance stood out from the rest it would be seriously considered!
Euan Dawson, Aberdeen



Systems: Compact, but under-powered?





Centralisation: Black boxes that will distribute your AV

Combining all your components into one unit is a reasonable idea in terms of saving space and money, though as you obviously realise, it's probably not the best way to get the highest-quality home cinema, as there will inevitably be compromises in terms of output power or some other aspect.

There are many home cinema systems which would meet most of your needs, comprising an AV amplifier, 3D Blu-ray player and radio tuner – but you are also paying for surround speakers which you may not want to use. Samsung's HT-D5100, for instance, features all the above, plus a 5.1 speaker array for around £260. Another alternative, Panasonic's SC-BTT370, costs more at around £430, but features larger speakers.

Disappointingly few home cinema systems come with a DAB tuner, so this is one component you may have to add yourself.

Central perk

I want to move all my video and audio equipment to a central location and then distribute HD video and audio to some or all of the rooms. What's the best way to do this? I want to be able to control the IR functions of all my gear from any room.
Bob Lamb via e-mail

There are several approaches to this problem, your choice depending on budget and the exact requirements of your system. One approach is to use coaxial or CAT5 networking, with a universal system controller and IR repeaters. Keene Electronics (www.keene.co.uk) offers products such as the Megaview system, which carries HDMI signals over CAT5 cables over a range of 30m.

An alternative would be a Powerline system for distribution of signals via your mains circuit. We've recently reviewed the HD JuiceBox from www.justhdmi.co.uk, and Devolo's DLAN system is now capable of carrying HD signals to network-compatible devices (www.devolo.com).

A custom installer would most likely recommend a more high-end controller such as a Crestron 8G system, which would be customisable to your needs. Some of these options are available from www.customcontrols.co.uk. Let us know what you go for and how you get on with the project!

Stay in sync

I have an annoying audio sync problem. I have a Pioneer PDP-4270XD plasma TV and a Media Centre PC using Media Player Home Cinema Edition and the KLite codec pack to play movie files. I also have Cyberlink Power DVD and a normal DVD player. I'm hooked up to a Yamaha DSP-A1 amp and a Monitor Audio 5.1 speaker set.

The audio is always slightly out of sync and I just don't seem to be able to work out the delay. I know it's caused by the video processing time of the plasma, but is there any way to find out what the time shift needs to be, or what it normally is for these types of plasmas?
Chris Lacey via e-mail

In fact, while this sort of audio sync error is quite common, it can be caused at practically any stage of the signal decoding/processing/display chain, so it might not be just the plasma screen that's to blame. Most modern amps have a sync adjustment feature to compensate, but unluckily the DSP-A1 doesn't!

So there are two solutions to the problem. One is a hardware digital delay device, which will process the sound and picture separately and allow you to correct the error. Something like the Felston DD740 will cost around £200 (www.felston.com). But since you are using a Media Center PC, it's probably easier if you adjust the sync at source; most media software, including Media Player Classic, VLC and so on, includes a sync adjust feature (it's usually found in an Audio submenu).

It's tricky to measure the actual sync delay, though there are ways to do it using time-coded source material; but you should be able to adjust sync by eye/ear until it looks/sounds right.

Bear in mind that this probably won't be a one-time solution; if other forms of sync delay creep in with other sources (some BDs for instance are poorly mastered and introduce their own problems), then you may have to re-adjust sync again

Need advice with your system? Send an email to letters@homecinemachoice.com with 'AV Clinic' in the subject line. Do note: We can't guarantee to print/answer all your enquiries!



In sync: Fixing audio delay can be tricky

Workshop.com

Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

I want more speakers

Hi, I'm about to purchase a new AVR and am seriously considering adding some extra (cheap) speakers to my lounge/cinema room at the same time so I can experience the 'Front Height' effect. My question is, which of Dolby Pro-Logic IIz, DTS: Neo X and Audyssey DSX is the most effective? Many AVRs offer two, if not all three, of these formats.
Stef Drew, via email

Okay, the truth is we can't answer that yet – we've heard all three technologies at work, but never in an A/B-style demonstration. But following your letter we're going to do just that – look out for our findings in a future issue.



Height: Onkyo's TX-NR5009 offers three types of processing

Badge me up!

I've noticed that a lot of the readers' rooms in your mag are decorated with THX/Dolby/DTS plaques. Where can I buy these from?
Simon, via email

As far as we know, you can't buy these from anywhere official. Both Dolby and DTS used to sell wall plaques, but a browse of their online shops reveals they seem to have stopped. So, you're best bet is to scour auction sites and find someone selling one. Or make them yourself!

Sharp shortage

Do you have any plans to review the Sharp LC-60LE831E? I know you loved the 46in version and wondered if the 60in performs as well? Being the happy owner of an LC-52XD1E for years I've never understood why Sharp seem to be overlooked in favour

Star Letter

Can HDMI-CEC take control of all my kit?

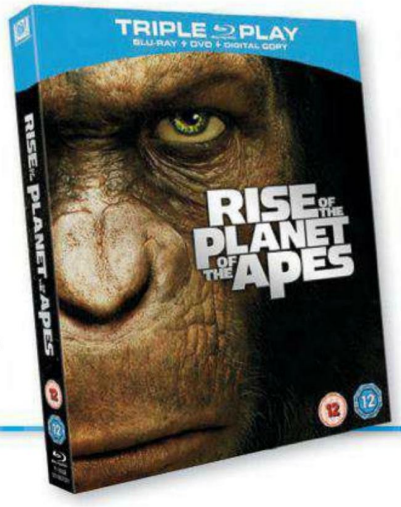
I have the Panasonic TX-P55VT30B connected via HDMI to a Pioneer AVR. Also connected via HDMI is a Pioneer DVD recorder. Does VieraLink only work if all the components are Panasonic, or does it work with other makes? Also, do you have any tips for sound dropout on Sky HD. It has been a problem from day one. Lots of people on the 'net mention this problem but Sky just doesn't seem interested in fixing it. With all my other equipment I have no sound problems at all – only Sky, whether connected via optical or HDMI.
Derek, via email

VieraLink is Panasonic's name for its implementation of the HDMI-CEC (Consumer Electronics Control) protocol. Pioneer calls it 'HDMI Control'; it's a shame that the manufacturers didn't get together and agree on a common term! There is, however, a good reason for this – proprietary differences. VieraLink, according to Panasonic, includes features that 'operate over and above the basic level of HDMI-CEC'. Among them are Dolby Digital audio loopthrough, and various eco controls that are designed to reduce power consumption when two Panasonic products are used together. Other manufacturers are likely to be doing the same.

In its core respects, though, HDMI-CEC is a universal standard. Features supported by VieraLink such as Auto Power On will work with other brands, and your TV handset should be able to operate CEC-compliant equipment. The latter description applies to both your recorder and AVR. Interestingly, the Pioneer webpage for the DVR-LX70D (http://www.pioneer.eu/uk/support/software/DVR-LX70D/index.html) includes a free firmware download (version 4.17). Although it doesn't say what problems have been addressed or features added, it might be worth upgrading if you're having problems.

As for Sky, audible dropouts from the digital audio output (optical, and more recently HDMI) have at various times plagued home cinema enthusiasts since Sky+ and multichannel audio were introduced. Sky Atlantic seems to be affected frequently, in both its SD and HD guises. Various fixes have been suggested, including a forced upgrade of the box firmware and a Sky Planner rebuild. On one forum, a contributor noted that dropouts occur at the same point on a recording as they did on the broadcast it was sourced from. This points to some kind of transmission or compatibility issue.

For its part, Sky will be contacting you directly. They told us the following: 'We have



of Samsung, Sony, etc when they offer such good value for money.

Also, do you know how well the Sharp remote Android app performs?
Phil Parry, via email

The simple answer to that is, no we don't. Obviously, we're somewhat reliant on manufacturers supplying us with review samples of new products – especially where expensive TVs are concerned – and Sharp hasn't managed to get us one. In fact, a look at the Sharp website shows the LC-60LE831E is no longer listed.

As for Sharp being 'overlooked' in favour of Sony and Samsung et al, that's probably because it releases far less screens a year. We've only seen a couple of its TVs in the last 12 months (and, yes, we loved the LC-46LE831E).

Oh, and as for the brand's Android app – we haven't played with this either. But as soon as we get a new TV through from Sharp, we'll give it a spin.



The Expendables: Director's Cut is hitting Blu-ray in the US

Disc wait

I noticed that there's a Director's Cut of *The Expendables* about to go on sale in the US on Blu-ray. Is this region-free? And if not, when can we expect to see it in the UK?
Farhan, via email

We're pretty certain that it's region-locked, like most of Lionsgate's US output. Saying that, by the time you read this it will have hit shelves, so have a look online if you can and see if anyone has checked it. http://bluray.liesinc.net is a good place to start.

We can think of no reason why Lionsgate won't also release this in the UK, though. *The Expendables* has made a ton of money both at cinemas and on Blu-ray, and this Director's Cut – which sounds quite tasty – will surely rake in more. Our bet would be a release timed to coincide with The Expendables 2 in August. Needless to say, we'll be pre-ordering our copy...

Backlight issues

A recent letter dismissing edge-lit LED LCD screens is interesting and provocative. There have been many comments in your own and other reviews of problems of light pools, uneven illumination etc. I have found this challenging. Early this year, I bought a Panasonic 37in TV which had been generally acclaimed in reviews I had read online and elsewhere. I was disappointed to find the lower left-hand edge had a light pool visible mostly on dark or night scenes. I took it back, and the store exchanged it for a slightly more expensive model. This had had mostly rave reviews. After careful calibration of the 'advanced' settings, I found a gorgeous picture of stunning detail and rich blacks and, most importantly, no trace of edge problems/light pools. Yet one review I had read said there was a trace of it on that model, too.

I can only conclude that there must be some variation at production level of the same models, with luck playing a part!
Roger Payne, via email

In the manufacture of TVs, as well as other consumer goods, there can be slight performance variations between individual product samples. When a TV or its key constituent components come off the production line, they are subjected to a series of tests. One of these is to confirm the uniformity of the screen's backlight – whether LED or CCFL. It's rare to find a completely uniform backlight, even when reviewing such sets, owing to tiny but quantifiable variations in light output between the LEDs or fluorescent tubes. Manufacturers do, however, tend to divide up components of similar performance into 'batches'. A set can be fitted exclusively with components from a given batch, thereby ensuring consistent performance.

Usually, testing is achieved by applying black- or white-field signals. Inconsistencies are obvious visually as 'patching' – readings of light-level from different parts of the screen are often taken, too. Any that deviate from the specification are rejected (as you may know, there's also a spec for the maximum number of 'dead pixels' that can be tolerated).

If the set you purchased suffered from unacceptably poor backlight uniformity, there are a number of possible reasons. Of these, the most obvious are (a) a 'rogue product' escaping from the factory or (b) handling damage affecting the light path in some way. Your Panasonic dealer seems to have acted in a responsible manner.

Panasonic's Steve Lucas adds the following: 'The models mentioned (37D28 and 37V20) use the same LED/LCD panel, although have a different bezel design. The issue of irregularity of illumination of the LCD panel by the edge-lit (in this case top/bottom) LED array are well known. Indeed only plasma technology (self-emitting pixels) is capable of 100 per cent uniformity. I would concur with your explanation that manufacturing tolerance's would be the most likely reason for the difference in these two TVs. It is something that Panasonic strive to improve with each generation of LED/LCD model'

worked to address customer concerns over reported dropout on multichannel digital audio connectivity to home cinema AV amplifiers. We are confident the digitally-encoded audio streams are of a high stability and should not be causing dropouts. We are investigating this customer's issue in further detail.' Sky added that "it is hard to address the exact problem without knowing what channels are being viewed, the specific box being used, connection type, etc.'

Winner: Star Letter-writer Derek wins a copy of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes: Triple Play Edition*, courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment. It's available to buy now, priced at £28 approx.

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington BR6 6BG or email us at letters@homecinemachoice.com. Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive.

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- **FREE Star Wars IV, V, VI Blu Ray Movie**

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- VIERA Neo Plasma
- Freeview HD & Freesat HD
- USB HDD Recording



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£1199 Best 46-47 inch TV 2011

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- **FREE Full 3D Blu Ray Player**
- **FREE Star Wars IV, V, VI Blu Ray Movie**

- Full HD 3D Plasma
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- USB HDD Recording



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REVIEWS

→Hardware highlights **TOSHIBA** Flagship 55in CEVO engine **ONKYO** Premium 9.2-channel AVR and THX-certified Blu-ray player **OPTOMA** Mid-range 3D home cinema projector **SONY** Bigscreen Bravia with soundbar stand **SPEAKERCRAFT** High-end sub/sat system **YAMAHA** Debut 3D BD deck **ROUNDUP** A trio of 5.1 packages go head-to-head **AND MORE!**



Towers of technology

KEF's new Q Series speakers marry the brand's cutting-edge Uni-Q tech to an eye-catching design. Turn to page 58 to see if we approve...

HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRAISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT – IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The TV with brains



Toshiba's CEVO tech arrives in style



AV/CV

PRODUCT: Well-built and gloriously powerful 55in LED TV

POSITION: Toshiba's flagship TV, sharing top billing with a silver version, the 55YL863

PEERS: Panasonic TX-P55VT30; Samsung UE55D8000; LG 55LW980T

HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★★ BEST BUY

Toshiba's latest TV finally brings a slice of its CELL TV brainpower to the UK, leaving **John Archer** a very happy man

Although a certain type of AV enthusiast shudders at the very mention of 'processing' in a TV, the reality is that no decent telly can produce good pictures without using at least some processing.

From my personal experience of testing TVs of all prices and abilities, I'd argue that what's really at issue isn't so much video processing *per se*, but the fact that some processing systems on mainstream TVs are rather, well, pants.

This is actually understandable given the extreme and therefore expensive amounts of processing power required to handle HD video streams 'on the hoof'. But the general low quality of TV picture processing certainly means I can't help get excited when a TV arrives that is confident enough to shout about its silicon smarts from the rooftops.

CEVOlution

Toshiba's 55in 55WL863 is one such TV: the first UK product to feature the brand's much-vaunted CEVO Engine. This heavy-duty processing system is designed to do everything from boosting a wide variety of picture parameters to enhancing multimedia playback, self calibration, improving 3D performance, delivering Toshiba's first 2D-to-3D upscaling, controlling an edge LED local dimming engine with more 'intelligence' than you usually get with such technologies, and making your breakfast. Probably.

If you're surprised to see Toshiba bringing us this apparently all-singing, all-dancing TV processor, then you clearly haven't heard of the brand's Japanese CELL Regza technology (see box out, p52). Of course, CELL is so powerful that the 55WL863's CEVO Engine only incorporates parts of it – but these 'parts' are still substantial enough to make the 55WL863 one of the most powerful flatscreens around.

The home for the 55WL863's fancy new powerhouse is rather lovely. At first you might think it's just another black TV rectangle. But as well as its bezel and rear both being exceptionally thin, its all-metal build quality is superb, making it a rare example of a TV that gets more appealing the closer you get to it. Toshiba's ongoing relationship with the Jacob Jensen Design Studio has definitely paid off this time. Even the stand is worthy of praise – while other brands still feel comfortable mounting two-grand tellies on wobbly bits of lightweight plastic, Toshiba's offering is a serious heavyweight slab that anchors the set reassuringly.

Given that the 55WL863 and its silver alternative, the 55YL863, are Toshiba's flagship TVs (until the supposedly imminent arrival of the ZL2 glasses-free 3D set), it's no surprise to find connections galore. HD and 3D duties are performed by four HDMI inputs, while multimedia options come courtesy of a D-Sub PC port, two USBs, a LAN and, excellently, built-in wi-fi.

The USBs can play plenty of photo, music and video file formats, and if you attach a suitably formatted USB HDD you can record video direct from the built-in Freeview HD tuner.

The set also sports an HD satellite tuner, but this isn't contained in a Freesat 'wrapper' and so ends up tuning so much rubbish that it's ultimately pointless.

The set's LAN/wi-fi connections do the double duties I'd expect of a flagship TV these days. Namely, they >

→ Specifications

3D: *YES* Full HD: *YES* 1080p24
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD, satellite
Component video: *YES* 1 x input
HDMI: *YES* 4 x v1.4
PC input: *YES* 1 x D-Sub
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Sound: 2 x 10W RMS
Brightness: 450cd/m²
Contrast ratio: 7,000,000:1
Dimensions (off stand): 1265(w) x 760(h) x 27.5(d)mm
Weight: 25.5kg
Also featuring: Active 3D playback (no glasses included); PRO-LED local dimming; USB media playback; noise reduction system; DLNA streaming; Places Smart TV online service; self-calibration option; extensive set up controls including colour management; 400Hz processing; 2D to 3D upscaling; built-in wi-fi; camera with face detection and human sensor

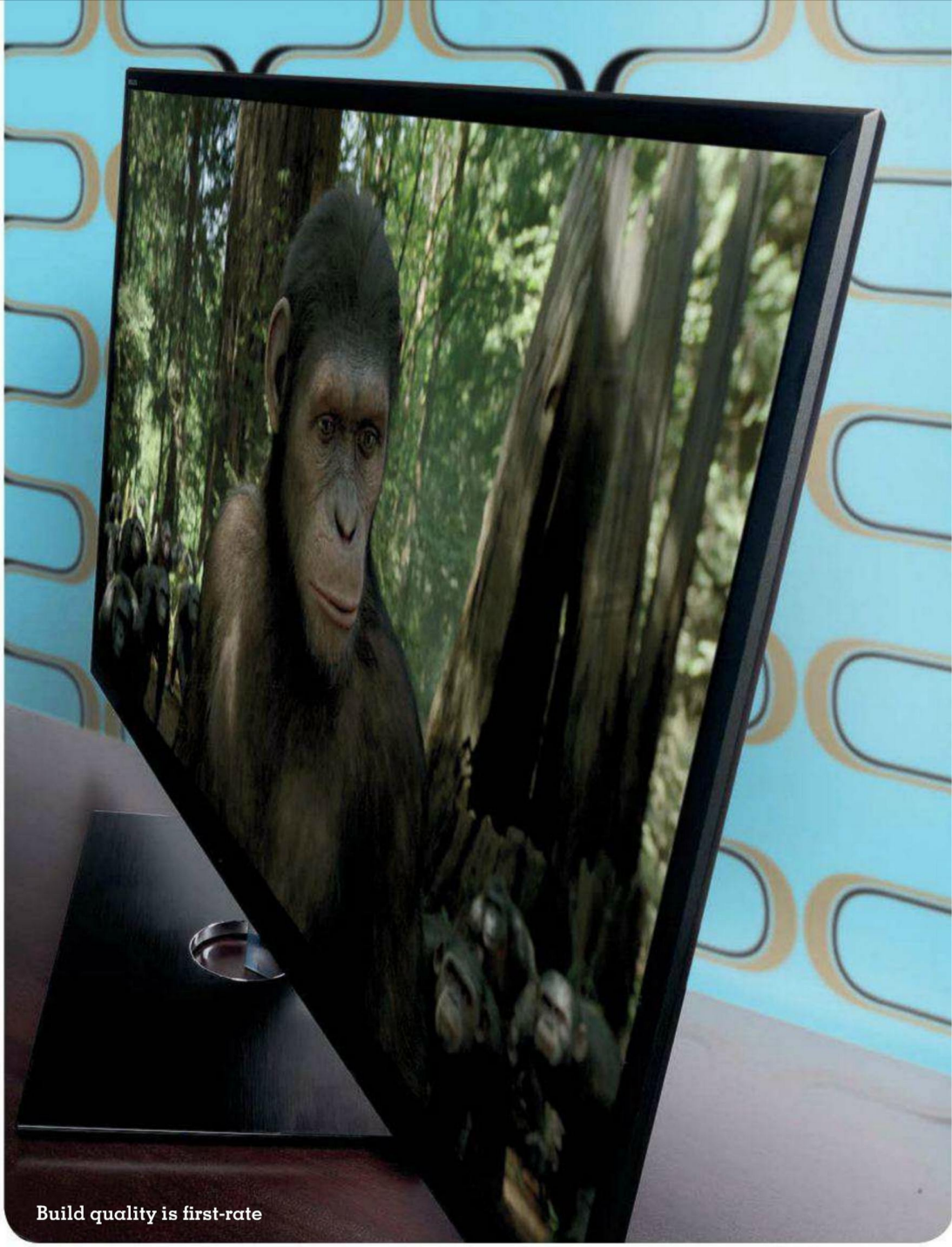
let you either jack into a networked PC, or 'surf' Toshiba's new Places online system.

Work in progress

Places has arrived rather late to the Smart TV party, and is still a B-list offering in content terms – though it is growing steadily. Now on offer are the BBC iPlayer, YouTube, and subscription services from The Cartoon Network, HiT Entertainment and Box Office 365 – but that's about it. Irritatingly the iPlayer and YouTube apps aren't properly integrated into the Places menus; selecting them throws up a message telling you to exit Places and access them separately. Hardly what I'd expect from a TV as supposedly clever as the 55WL863.

While somewhat 'unfinished' right now, though, Places has serious potential for the future thanks to its attractive interface and its efforts to personalise proceedings. Different users can set up individual accounts, configuring their own email addresses and favourite content lists, and there's even a camera in the TV that can recognise who's using it and automatically activate the right personal Places settings. The low quality of this camera led to a few identification errors during my tests, but it's still a great idea for Toshiba to build on.

CEVO Engine's presence is abundantly evident throughout the 55WL863's onscreen menus, which include not only a wide variety of calibration options – including colour and gamma management – but also an auto calibration process. Get yourself Toshiba's



Build quality is first-rate

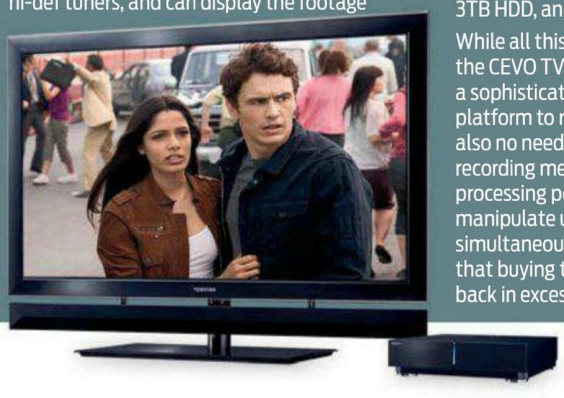
Gogglebox becomes brainbox...

How Toshiba's CEVO TV differs from its CELL-powered Japanese sibling

It was at the Japanese CEATEC show in 2009 that Toshiba first unveiled to gobsmacked show-goers its CELL Regza technology, included as part of the 55X1 television. In fact, the CELL technology (which also lurks in Sony's PS3) was so powerful that Toshiba couldn't fit it into the flatscreen's main body, and had to tuck it inside an external box.

To put some numbers on CELL's power, it achieves an arithmetic processing capability approximately 143 times that of Toshiba's usual Regza TVs. This lets it simultaneously work on even more aspects of picture quality than CEVO does (including a 'self-congruency' system for improving image quality at the edges of the pictures, and advanced local control over 512 LED illumination 'zones').

While some of this picture processing has made its way into CEVO Engine, though, CELL Regza eclipses CEVO with the amount of sources and multimedia it can handle. For example, the CELL Regza box carries no less than eight hi-def tuners, and can display the footage from all of these tuners onscreen at once – then it's just a case of your brain keeping up with the action.



CELL Regza can even simultaneously record all eight tuners for 26 hours courtesy of a built-in 3TB HDD, and sports an Opera Web browser.

While all this would have been a treat to get on the CEVO TV, in reality the UK just doesn't have a sophisticated enough terrestrial broadcasting platform to require so many tuners. So there's also no need to offer huge quantities of built-in recording memory, and no need to deliver the processing power necessary to stream and manipulate up to eight video streams simultaneously. Plus there's the small matter that buying this CELL Regza TV would set you back in excess of £8,000...

optional TPA-1 colour meter kit and attach it to one of the TV's USB ports, and the 55WL863 can calibrate itself in accordance with the video standards preferred by professional bodies like the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF).

I ran this procedure myself, and aside from some slightly off red tones, it certainly delivered a more nuanced and 'accurate' image than any of the TV's presets. That said, I suspect most mainstream users will find the calibrated image a touch flat. Plus the TPA-1 costs a rather intimidating £250.

Just as well, then, that the CEVO Engine's efforts ensure that the 55WL863 produces truly excellent picture quality using just the standard, built-in set up options and presets.

Particularly remarkable is the quality of the TV's upscaling, not just of standard-definition sources but also fodder streamed from the internet. The CEVO-powered Resolution+ system does a sterling job of adding detail and sharpness without causing the picture to fall prey to extra noise or fuzzing. Toshiba has long been the King of video upscaling (remember the XD-E500 DVD player?) and it shows no signs of letting that crown slip.

Back in black

The CEVO Engine also seems to play a part in the 55WL863's contrast performance. Provided you don't leave the backlight set higher than '60', it's immediately and gratifyingly obvious that the serious backlight consistency issues that have afflicted many of Toshiba's edge LED TVs this year are here more or less completely conquered – by, presumably, the more sophisticated nature of the set's local dimming system.

The quality of the local dimming also means you see only the tiniest traces of the 'light blocking' phenomenon around bright objects often seen with other locally-dimmed edge LED sets. The result is rich, deep blacks sitting right alongside really punchy, dynamic colours and whites.

Actually, slightly off-kilter reds aside, the 55WL863's colours are nothing short of outstanding. Vibrant saturations combine beautifully with seemingly immaculate blends and a very wide colour range.

Enhancing the 55WL863's high-end credentials still further is its excellent fine detail prowess.



Cover up: The concept of the slider (to hide different quantities of buttons depending on your confidence levels) is a sound one

Pictures thus look crisp, full of texture and more three-dimensional – even when watching 2D! – than your average TV. The sense of sharpness persists, moreover, when the picture contains motion, even if you don't employ the set's optional motion processing. Again, I suspect CEVO's power is at least partly responsible for the screen's apparently lightning response time.

Turning from the 55WL863's hugely impressive 2D pictures to its 3D ones, at first everything is positive. Immediately I was startled by how bright and colourful images still looked through Toshiba's active shutter 3D glasses (none of which are included free with the TV, sadly). Certainly, 3D pictures seem markedly brighter than they do on Sony and Panasonic 3D sets, with only Samsung's top-end LED models and LG's passive 3D TVs serving up similar levels of dynamism.

Activate the CEVO-powered version of Toshiba's Resolution+ system while watching full HD 3D Blu-rays, meanwhile, and you'll find yourself watching what for my money are **comfortably the sharpest, most detailed 3D pictures yet seen on a flatscreen. Stunning**.

However, the 55WL863 falls prey to a single but irritating flaw: crosstalk noise. This double ghosting phenomenon affects almost all 3D TVs to some extent, but it's slightly worse than average on the 55WL863 – especially when watching Sky's 3D broadcasts. This is galling, as the CEVO engine is supposed to beaver away and eliminate this type of picture flaw. If you plan on watching a lot of 3D content, get a demo and see if it bothers you before you buy.

On the audio side, the 55WL863 doesn't sound bad at all, with good treble detailing and a mid-range open enough to avoid sounding harsh during action scenes. More bass would have been nice, but such is skinny TV life.

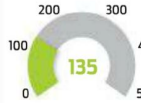
Raising the standard

With the CEVO Engine at the reins, the 55WL863 is an outstanding TV – easily Toshiba's best flatscreen yet. It does some pretty spectacular things with 3D when crosstalk isn't getting in the way, and with 2D it's never less than a joy to watch. And the build quality and usability are second to none.

CEVO, we salute you

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

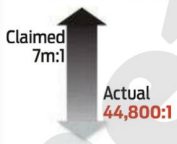


White screen: Compared to other current 55in LED sets, Toshiba's TV is quite power-hungry...



Test footage: ...although with movie material, consumption drops to an average of 115W

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: Out of the box, contrast measured 44,800:1 with a luminance 91.6fL. Dynamic mode increases it to an eye-searing 414,000:1 and a luminance of 121.fL

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: Full calibration tools mean 6,500K is achievable
Dynamic: 11,000K
Hollywood Night: 6,900K
Hollywood Day: 6,900K
Game: 9,400K

Onscreen: Menu



No place like home: Toshiba's Places portal sports hi-res icons and a simple-to-navigate interface – but it needs beefing up to compete with the likes of Samsung and Sony



HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 55WL863B
£1,800 Approx

Highs: Beautiful build quality; exemplary 2D pictures; mostly very good 3D; well-presented online portal and GUI

Lows: Noticeable crosstalk on 3D; Places needs more content

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

worldofhifi.net

Master of drama

Richard Stevenson finds it hard to resist this 3D-capable, connection-studded AVR, despite its chunky price. He wants to keep it forever...



Onkyo's TX-NR5009 can power a full 9.2-channel cinema system

Onkyo's flagship TX-NR5009 receiver is so crammed full of goodies I really don't know where to start. The big price ticket might put some off, but I reckon it's spectacularly good value. It has all the high-end goodies, too, such as the massive toroidal transformer, separate power supply for A/V processing and a multi-layer chassis to reduce vibration.



AV/CV

PRODUCT: Fully featured 9.2-channel networked AVR

POSITION: Tops Onkyo's integrated AVR lineup

PEERS: Yamaha RX-A3010; Arcam AVR-600

The chipset list reads like a who's who in AV technology and there are some features you won't find on rival receivers, including ISF video calibration and 4K video scaling. You won't be surprised to hear that it sports a shiny, top-of-the-line THX Ultra2 Plus certification, Audyssey' top-spec MultEQ XT32 EQ system and nine channels of amplification.

The TX-NR500 is a big, heavy beast to wrestle from the box. In the supplied black it has cosmetics somewhere between Knightrider's KITT car and a small house. The brushed aluminium is lush, the buttons solid and the drop-down flap conceals most of the essential buttonage should one lose the remote control, or indeed any of your Apple OS or Android devices running the Onkyo remote App. Front-mounted USB, HDMI, analogue AV and optical digital inputs rate as the perfect array of front-facing connections. The main volume knob is a bit lightweight in feel, but with all those control options are you ever going to use it anyway?

Connections galore

Back panel connectivity doesn't match Denon's mighty A1HD in sheer number terms, but the TX-NR5009 has got it where it counts. The seven HDMI inputs and twin outputs are all 3D and 4K video capable, the analogue connections are gold-plated and 11 sets of binding posts cater for every conceivable iteration of speaker configuration. This includes any type of 9.2 using height or width processing right down to vanilla 5.1 in the main room and two separately powered stereo zones.

A 32bit processor handles audio processing, feeding a raft of Burr-Brown 192kHz/32bit DACs for all channels. The Audyssey MultXT32 EQ system can analyse and EQ two subwoofer channels independently, making the unit a 9.2-channel AVR. You get Dynamic Volume and EQ in the Audyssey suite, plus Dolby Volume, which aims to achieve reference sound balance at any volume level.

HQV's latest Vida chipset has been implemented for core processing duties, backed by a cutting-edge Qdeo scaler, which will take any video input and upscale it to 4096 x 2304 pixels. The Vida processor uses expanded 12bit colour processing and HQV's StreamClean technology. This aims to cleans up compressed video in real time by eliminating mosquito and block noise from lower quality sources. Tested with some reasonable quality YouTube footage this worked exceptionally well. Obviously, 4K displays are few and far between at present, particularly at my house, so I were unable to test this feature at this time.

Network features have been given a particular buff-up by Onkyo, although there is no on-board wi-fi, which is a bit remiss. Still, the TX-NR5009 is a DLNA-certified machine with direct access to your Spotify, Napster and last.FM accounts. Internet radio is predominantly supplied by vTuner, although those of a brave disposition may want to try the surreal Aupeo! This German-based streaming service sifts music streams by the wildest categories including your mood. Next time you want music that is particularly 'stressful', 'dramatic' or 'danceable', Aupeo! is at your service. Surprisingly, there's no AirPlay compatibility.

The interface is a multi-paged menu affair that forgoes animation in favour of getting the info across in more detail. Each feature comes with a little explanation at the bottom of the screen and the whole interface is neat and intuitive. The two-way remote control is a little bland, yet easy to navigate, and the Onkyo App is best described as functional. A new App should be launched by >



Remote: It's design won't win any awards, but it is easy to use

Specifications

Dolby TrueHD: YES and DD Plus, DPL IIz, Dolby Volume
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES and DTS 96/24, Neo:X
THX: YES THX Ultra2 Plus
Multichannel input: YES 7.1 channel
Multichannel output (claimed): 9 x 220W
Multiroom: YES 3 zones
AV inputs: YES 5 x composite; 4 x S-video; 7 x digital audio (4 x optical and 3 x coaxial)
HDMI: YES 8-in 2-out, v1.4
Video upscaling: YES to 4K!
Component video: YES 3-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 435(w) x 463(d) x 198(h) mm
Weight: 25kg
Also featuring: HQV Vida video processing; ISF video calibration; Apple OS and Android control Apps; Bi-amping ability; DSD direct for SACD; powers zone 2/3; anti-vibration chassis; RIHD system control; Audyssey Dynamic EQ; DLNA certified; iPod via USB or optional dock; Ethernet; WMA, AAC, MP3, FLAC, OggVorbis and WAV playback via USB; Audyssey MultEQ XT32 RoomEQ; supplied mic; FM/AM tuner; vTuner, Spotify, Last.fm, Napster; Aupeo!



Socket surplus: You'll be hard pressed to run out of connection options here

the time you are reading this review, which is purportedly going to give Pioneer's sumptuous iControlAV a run for its money.

Set-up using 7.1 channels as standard, plus height speakers for full-bore 9.1 cinema, took about an hour including the EQ procedure discovering two connection issues with a newly installed cabling loom. Once you have run the Audyssey setup, there is no way of graphically displaying exactly what sort of EQ filtering the system has applied to each speaker. But as the result was pretty spectacular, maybe it's not such a big issue.

Centred dialogue

I turned once again to Star Trek. The opening battle sequence, as the Romulan ship *Narada* engages the *USS Kelvin*, is delivered with an explosive power and warp speed. The Onkyo crafts the whole soundstage with a crisp and involving dynamic and dialogue that is supremely well articulated. The height processing perfectly draws the dialogue to centre screen and gives the entire front-end soundstage a tangible three-dimensional presence. I found I had to give the rear effects channels a tweaking of a dB or two just so they were not lost to the epic front of cinema sound.

The scene unfolds with scale and precision, and as the classical score swells above the battle to iterate the inevitable demise of Kirk senior, the Onkyo absolutely nails it. The atmosphere, dialogue and the effects all come together in a perfect ballet of sound that conveys a huge emotional climax. I have seen the sequence a dozen times and yet I found the Onkyo's stellar performance brought tears to my eyes as if it was the first time I saw it.

Skip to the young James T Kirk driving his classic sports car across the Iowa desert and the Onkyo keeps up the pace with aplomb. The rock/rap soundtrack thunders into the room, but never masks the sound of the car itself. When the car goes over the cliff an explosion of sound effects that fill the room, played out in slow-mo just to ensure you hold your breath for a little longer. It is an all-channels festival of sound and if there is any criticism to be levelled at the TX-NR5009 it is a little bit of hardness when all channels are being driven really loud.

The dramatic cut to Spock in the Vulcan academy is thrilling in its dynamic change of pace. Here **the Onkyo delivers the size and airiness of the hall with a spacious grace that really paints the atmosphere in detail.** Close your eyes and you can be in that high-ceilinged room, and Spock's voice is conveyed with attention to the smallest inflection or detail as he grows older by the cut-scene. His final line, 'live long and prosper' is delivered to the Vulcan command with a faint contempt that lesser AVRs simply fail to capture.

This one's a keeper

With a few minor caveats, the TX-NR5009 is an outstanding success. It is mind-bogglingly well featured, offers unique functionality and sounds crisply detailed and eloquently dynamic. From a receiver review that I found hard to start, I am left with a performance I find hard to end. Just one more Blu-ray, then...

→ Tech Labs

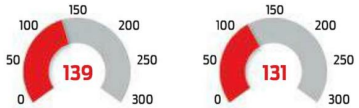
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Blimey. This is one component you really don't want to leave on when you go away for the weekend

Powered: Real world consumption (5.1) averaged 290W

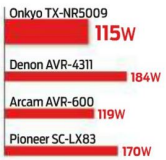
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



2-channel 8Ω: An excellent two-channel rating into 8Ω. This is a stereo powerhouse

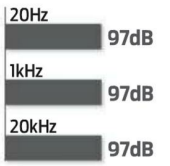
5-channel 8Ω: Remarkable little drop off in five-channel mode, and we measured 125W in seven-channel

Untainted: Watts



Fidelity firewall: A measurement of power untainted by distortion (0.02% THD, 8Ω, 1kHz)

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests: Excellent signal-to-noise figures across the range

Onscreen: Menu



Smart hub: Hi-res graphics smarten up the mainly text-based setup menus



HCC VERDICT

Onkyo TX-NR5009
£2,700 Approx

Highs: Excellent video processing; features galore; dynamic sound
Lows: No AirPlay or EQ graphic display; slight hardening at very high volume

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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It's time to form an orderly Q...

Adam Rayner reacquaints himself with KEF's pioneering Uni-Q driver technology – and enjoys picking and choosing his own 5.1 array



Just for once, I am going to give you the meat and potatoes straight away, we can wait for a moment for the narrative... These speakers are bloody brilliant, in many ways and on a good few levels. They draw upon lots of their predecessors' technology, and while KEF makes speakers going right up to cost-no-object levels, this new Q Series (as against the still-sold 'Classic Q Series') have been made to a remarkably keen price for what they do. This has been done both by cutting corners where possible (the grilles aren't magnetic, for instance) and using evolved, proven design cunning for the sonic result to be so amazingly uncompromised everywhere else.

Memory lane

KEF was one of the very first high-quality UK speaker manufacturers I ever heard of. Back in the day, my mate's dad was a typesetter for the *Financial Times*, which enabled him to raise his five kids in a posh house in the shires. There was a pair of KEFs in his living room and they were delicious. A listen to Pink Floyd afterwards was always part of the pleasure of going over there to chop wood for the Aga to earn my Sunday lunch!

Then a few years ago, I had to go to KEF to review its mighty forty-

AV/CV

PRODUCT: 5.1 mid-range speaker array

POSITION: Below the XQ and R Series

PEERS: B&W 683; Monitor Audio RX8; PSB Imagine

thousand pound (well it was back then...) Reference system in full 7.2 glory. Using the Denon AVP/POA pre-power combo (dubbed The Death Star by the PR man) to run it on, I loved it and practically turned the room spherical with sound pressure during testing. Put it this way – the receptionist looked scared of me when we came out of the room.

One Reference customer made the 'yes' decision the week the review came out – so perhaps KEF has a soft spot for *HCC*. That might explain why, when asked to supply the new Q Series for us to review, they all but sent the lot [er, actually that was my fault – Ed].

You see, I do have 7.2 capability in my home with my Pioneer LX-series AVR driving a sizeable five-channel external amplifier and another big-bottomed stereo amp (as the on-board amps of the Pioneer are bloody good but not as 'reference' as I need – I use if just for the awesome processing). But my home is set up to have the cinema dominate one end of a typical suburban through-lounge, with the sofa against the wall as against floating in mid floor. So, personally, I favour reviewing a 5.1 system as it doesn't involve rearranging all my furniture. So imagine my surprise when I got sent 13.1 channels of speakers!



The new Q series design is beautifully bold

Picking my poison

Here's what I got and what I actually tried out. First, the inventory was a pair of the Q700 towers, two pairs of the Q500 towers, a big Q600C centre, two pairs of Q800ds dipoles and a set of Q300 bookshelfers to go with the Q400b subwoofer. Whew! I could have tried 7.1 with towers all round, or side towers and rear bookshelf, or 7.1 with two pairs of dipoles. As it was, I went 5.1 with the Q300 bookshelf speakers as rears, the Q700 and Q600C out front and the seemingly undergunned 200W 10in Q400b subwoofer on low-end duty. Afterwards, I also tried out the dipoles as rears, too.

This was cool for my room as it matches the configuration of myriad sets of speakers I have tested and meant that the fabulously sweet Uni-Q driver arrays were all the same size. I can hear the slight difference in unmatched tweeters and midband, even with genuine efforts made by makers to achieve even voicing.

That said, **you can assemble any system you want to fit your world, as that Uni-Q driver array is a work of beauty**. Hardly any gubbins inside to get in the way of the sound as the drivers' roll offs have a lot to do with the control. I gather the passive crossovers are very basic.

And the cabinets are cleverly made. The manual calls them 'Bass Reflex' in the specifications breakdown but that is the same term most manufacturers use to describe a ported speaker. One with a hole in it, like the Q300 speakers – although these do come with a foam port bung so you can seal them up and have them play a bit flatter and reach a bit deeper. I left mine ported, figuring I'd rather benefit from port gain calculated by a geeky, golden-eared KEF engineer.

The centre and front left/right speakers have what look like multiple drivers. Yet they don't, they have ABR or Auxiliary Bass>



Point to prove: The Q700s floorstanders come with optional spiked feet

Resonators. These are dummy cones-in-suspension. Just like the cone assemblies of the bass drivers that have 50mm voice coils on their behinds, except ABRs just wobble. This I discovered when prodding them. You can see which drivers are connected, by micro-mimic-movements of the other cones caused by the back EMF you create with an even shove. But as I pushed one, the other just pooched out... interesting.

Who's there?: The Q800ds diploes craft a more dispersed soundfield

A passive radiator, as these are called generically, acts as both port and sealed box. You get the extra lows from the air being shifted and yet as there is no super-low frequency acoustic short-circuit – as happens below the tuning of a ported box – you get the speakers' driver reaching as low as its suspension will allow. All this tech translates to drivers that drop lower than a snake's belly with aplomb and control – very hi-fi.



The rest of the array can shake your room, too. I was thinking the Q400b subwoofer was measly at only 200W but it has a heck of a transducer – a 10in job that grips the low-end with precision and melodic accuracy, which is far too rare a thing in home subwoofers!

Hey, good-looking

As you can tell, I really enjoyed these speakers and don't care that they have square fronts rather that curvy swoopy woodwork. In fact, **this 'industrial' design, as it's no doubt called by the marketing department at KEF HQ, is something of a breath of fresh air**.

I also loved that, unlike a subwoofer I recently auditioned which used Ebony and offended my environmental sensibilities, these are made from eco-friendly materials.

So: a gorgeous set of speakers, whose Uni-Q technology means delicate tinkly highs of fabulous transparency and beauty. They do get a bit harsh if you drive 'em too hard, but you will be raising all levels of hell and excitement before you achieve that.

Demo material included the new De Niro movie *Limitless* on Blu-ray. I had to screen it twice so I could take more notes as the KEF system quickly had me sucked into the action. It lapped up the film's excellent stereo rear-channel stuff – in bars and street scenes – as well as the huge fat richness from the front array.

I also swapped out the Q300s for the Q800ds dipoles. These angular cabinets, with their two out-of-phase 5.25in Uni-Q drivers, are pukka. They create a rear stage that seemingly disappears. It's just 'there'. Brilliantly crafted, but I still love that more discrete sound, so for me, it'd be a £150 saving on the use of Q300 rather than Q800ds.

Either way, these new Q Series speakers are clearly the offspring of some very clever parents and out-perform many systems from other makers at higher prices. And best of all, it's all in a rich hi-fi flavour beloved of British audiophiles. Clean, grippy yet not overblown.

Pure KEF-ness, for a bit less

→Specifications

KEF Q700 floorstander

Drive Units: 1 x 6.5in Uni-Q midbass driver with co-incident Uni-1in vented dome tweeter; 1 x 6.5in low-frequency driver; 2 x 6.5in Auxiliary Bass Radiators
Enclosure: Two and a half-way bass reflex
Frequency Response: 40Hz-40kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power handling: 130W
Dimensions: 295(w) x 917(h) x 312(d)
Weight: 15kg

KEF Q600c centre

Drive Unit: 1 x 6.5in Uni-Q midbass driver with co-incident Uni-1in vented dome tweeter; 1 x 6.5in low-frequency driver; 1 x 6.5in ABR
Enclosure: Three-way bass reflex
Frequency Response: 45Hz-40kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power handling: 150W
Dimensions: 629(w) x 210(h) x 302(d)
Weight: 14.1kg

KEF Q300 bookshelf

Drive Unit: 1 x 6.5in Uni-Q midbass driver with co-incident Uni-1in vented dome tweeter
Enclosure: Two-way ported
Frequency Response: 42Hz-40kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power handling: 120W
Dimensions: 210(w) x 355(h) x 302(d)
Weight: 7.7kg

KEF Q400b subwoofer

Drive Unit: 1 x 10in
Enclosure: Sealed front-firing
Frequency Response: 28Hz-140Hz
On board power: 200 RMS Class D amp
Dimensions: 330(w) x 335(h) x 330(d)mm
Weight: 13.6Kg
Connections: Stereo phono input (right channel may be used in mono from LFE feed as 'Smart Connect') and high-level speaker input via supplied quick-release plug system



HCC VERDICT

KEF Q Series 5.1
Approx £2,400

Highs: Wonderful, delicate transparency; grip and control; eye-catching aesthetics
Lows: Non-magnetic grilles leave leg-holes when removed; can sound harsh at very high levels

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Stuck in the middle

Optoma's first 3D PJ offers Full HD at a very aggressive price point. But that's not enough for **John Archer**





If you want to get a handle on what makes the Optoma HD83 one of the year's most interesting projectors, all you have to do is take in its price: £2,400. This makes it comfortably more affordable than the likes of Panasonic's AT5000 and Sony's VPL-HW30ES.

Naturally, though, 'affordable' does not necessarily equate to 'best'. After all, hitting a budget price generally requires brands to make some hard choices over what specs to reduce and what features to cut. However, on paper at least, the HD83 seems to have emerged surprisingly strongly from Optoma's cost-cutting process.

For a start, its elongated and chunky shape certainly gives you plenty of bulk for your buck. This could potentially be an issue, I guess, for people thinking of using an HD83 in a 'casual' way, whereby it's only brought out of storage when it's needed, rather than being permanently installed.

From my videophile point of view, though, I'm rather encouraged by the HD83's size, as it raises the possibility of some uncompromising innards – including integrated venting systems that could help reduce fan noise.

Yet whatever the HD83's design might promise about its performance, there's no getting round the fact that it's not particularly attractive. Its unpolished black exterior feels plasticky, and the 'ribbed' look of its side panels makes it look a bit too business-like for a domestic environment.

I have no concerns with the HD83's connections, though. With its twin HDMIs, component video input, D-Sub PC port, RS-232 and two 12V triggers, it's on a connectivity par with projectors costing much more.

Handy: Small, backlit and comfortable in your palm



Outside the box

The sort of casual users mentioned earlier might be miffed to discover that the HD83 doesn't integrate its 3D transmitter. Rather it's a (free, included) external unit attached to a DIN port via a rather short cable. While this approach is obviously less tidy than using an integrated transmitter, Optoma's external transmitter is startlingly small, so you can barely see it once it's resting on the PJ's top or sat down at its side.

At first I was concerned that the transmitter just wasn't going to be big enough to deliver a stable 3D signal to the two pairs of active shutter glasses provided free with the unit. But during my tests the signal transmission proved exceptionally stable and consistent, thanks to Optoma's decision to go for an RF-based system rather than the more common, sometimes quite flaky IR iteration. Excellent.

Optoma claims a contrast ratio of 50,000:1 for the HD83, in conjunction with 1600 ANSI Lumens of brightness. On paper these figures look extremely impressive, and raise no red flags to suggest that the HD83 might struggle to match the performance standards of its more expensive Panasonic and Sony rivals.

Attempting to set the HD83 up initially threw up a major concern, however, as I couldn't for the life of me spot any vertical image shifting system. But then, of course, in typical male fashion I hadn't bothered to read the instruction manual...

Reluctantly delving into this revealed that the PJ does have vertical image shifting, courtesy of a wheel tucked away at the bottom of the projector, under the lens. However, actually using this wasn't



The HD83 undercuts rival 3D PJs from Panasonic and Sony

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Enticingly priced Full HD 3D PJ

POSITION: Despite offering 3D, the HD83 is not Optoma's flagship model – it sits below the 2D-only HD87

PEERS: Panasonic PT-AT5000; Sony VPL-HW30

much fun thanks to a combination of its tricky positioning and a lack of precision with its adjustments. It doesn't help, either, that the amount of vertical zoom isn't extensive. Certainly I couldn't get the image low enough from my usual projection stand, meaning I had to pop the HD83 on a table instead.

With an image finally locked in place on my 90in screen, I was pleased to find that a) many elements of the HD83's pictures looked good straight out of the box, and b) where the picture did benefit from some calibration, the tools provided were reasonably wide-ranging and well presented.

Among these options are offset and brightness adjustments for all six main colour elements; gain and bias tweaks for the RGB colour elements; a variety of gamma presets; and colour gamut presets covering all the key video standards that interest the video enthusiast.

The HD83 additionally sports Optoma's own PureEngine processing system. This contains three elements aimed at improving colours, detailing and motion reproduction – and given that such >

→ Specifications

3D: YES Active shutter
Full HD: YES 1080p24
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES 2 x HDMI, v1.4
PC input: YES one D-Sub
12V Trigger: YES x 2
Contrast ratio (claimed): 50,000:1
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI Lumens
Dimensions: 490(w) x 372(d) x 194(h)mm Weight: 8.4kg
Also featuring: PureEngine processing; CMS; Vertical/horizontal lens shift; supplied external 3D transmitter; vertical keystone correction; 22dB fan noise; 4,000 hour lamp life



Double up: Two HDMI inputs make it easy to plug in temporary sources

systems don't have a great track record on relatively cheap projectors, I was surprised with the HD83 to find that provided you handle them with care, the colour and motion reproduction elements, at least, are worth trying. The motion system certainly tidied up some slightly strange resolution loss over moving objects, especially when watching 3D material. Although I have to say I was a bit disappointed by the HD83's 3D performance.

None too bright

The problem, chiefly, is that the projector doesn't seem able to produce enough brightness to propel 3D images out with sufficient dynamism to counter the dimming effect of Optoma's (quite comfy) glasses. This is surprising given the quoted brightness output of 1600 Lumens, but it's undeniable that even bright scenes don't look especially punchy or vibrant. As for dark 3D scenes like the opening desert sequence in *Thor*, the underlying lack of brightness has a pretty devastating impact on shadow detail, leaving dark areas looking hollow and largely devoid of the sort of visual 'cues' that normally help a low-light 3D image deliver a sense of depth.

Optoma's premium 2D projector, the HD87, suffers a similar lack of shadow detailing, but the problem is certainly amplified severely when you add active shutter glasses to the mix.

No amount of tinkering with the HD83's settings managed to satisfactorily solve the problem, as ramping up the brightness as high as it would go simply left dark images looking grey and flat rather than black and flat.

Making this single issue all the more aggravating is that the HD83 does very well in another common area of 3D failure: crosstalk. Typical crosstalk flashpoints from *Monsters Vs Aliens* and *Tangled* suffer only very slightly on the HD83 with the ghosting problem that troubles so many active 3D displays, allowing you to appreciate better the advantages of the Full HD 3D Blu-ray format. Until, that is, dark scenes crop up and so much of that lovely detail gets crushed out.

The HD83 is a more satisfying 2D projector. Its HD 2D pictures look crisper (though I have seen sharper) and crucially the balance between achieving a good black level while retaining shadow detail is more effective. That said, there's still not enough shadow detail to leave dark scenes looking totally convincing.

So while the HD83 handles bright, colourful 2D scenes very ably for its money, giving them a good sense of vibrancy and solidity, an unfortunate side effect of this is that such effectively rendered scenes just throw the projector's shadow detail problems with dark scenes into even sharper relief.

The HD83 is ultimately an oddity. In many areas it exhibits clear signs of Optoma's long experience with home cinema projectors and can be considered a solid 2D performer, but its troubling lack of brightness during dark scenes has to class as an unexpected error of judgement – especially on a projector that's supposed to have been designed with 3D in mind

→Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts





White screen: The HD83 sucks 291W with our 100IRE white screen test

Test footage: Consumption is identical when playing a movie, as the lamp's brightness doesn't change

TV Contrast: Ratio



Colour temp: Kelvin



Picture: A disappointing contrast measurement considering Optoma's claim, with a luminance of 13.2fL

Presets: The D65 preset is spot on
D50: 5,100K
D65: 6,500K
D75: 7,500K
D83: 8,200K
D93: 8,900K



HCC VERDICT

Optoma HD83
£2,400 Approx

Highs: Good connectivity; plenty of set up options; affordable

Lows: Lack of brightness during dark scenes (especially with 3D); missing shadow detail in dark scenes; limited vertical shift

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

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Little league LED

Steve May wonders if this budget LED TV is a wise purchase

Hannspree has cultivated a reputation for 'novelty' TVs – but it also puts out a range of keenly priced conventional tellies, too. This 28in Freeview model, for example, is one of the cheapest LED small screens you can buy. Perfect, you might think, for a bedroom or office.

But before you rush out to order one, there's something you should know. This 'wide' TV doesn't conform to the worldwide widescreen ratio of 16:9. Instead it uses a 16:10 panel with a resolution of 1,920 x 1,200. This means that it stretches everything to fit unless you put it in 'widescreen mode' which gets you black bars top and bottom!

Pros

- If you're looking for a screen to play downloaded video files via USB, the SV28LMMB hits the spot. The integrated media player is versatile, handling VOB, MKV, MOV, MP4 and AVI video files. WAV, M4A/AAC and MP3s also play.
- Connectivity is good, too, with two HDMI inputs; PC D-sub, Scart, component, coaxial digital output and CI slot. Build quality is also fine for the cash.
- With a smart, fashionable design and substantial stand, this thinscreen looks the part.

Cons

- Image quality is average, with orangey reds and dark grey blacks at best. And with motion picture resolution at less than 600 lines, nor is this a screen optimised for fast-moving video games.
- The TV box art sports a 3D badge, but this is not a 3DTV. Instead this is a reference to a comb filter.
- The 2 x 5W audio is so squawky you'd think it has a proprietary Parakeet preset.



Bigger screen: Hannspree's TV uses a 16:10 panel

HCC VERDICT
Hannspree SV28LMMB
£200 Approx
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

PANASONIC DMR-HW100 → £300 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk

No frills Freeview+HD

Converts 2D to 3D, but is otherwise limited, says **Grant Rennell**

This neat-looking hard-disk only recorder sits alongside Panasonic's Freeview+ HD PVR/ Blu ray combi range, retaining some of the functionality and aesthetics of its BD-blessed brothers – including 2D-3D conversion and access to Smart TV features.

The unit's twin tuners allow for dual recording to the modest HDD, but be aware that is only 320GB, which might not be enough for your timeshifting needs.

Two-dimensional SD and HD broadcasts look especially good via HDMI and are notably made a tad smoother by 1080p upscaling. The 3D conversion isn't quite as good as that of Samsung's BD-DT7800 PVR, I we still got a thrill watching *QI*'s whizzy graphical intro given an added dimension.

Pros

- As well as looking good, recordings can be edited afterwards, but not archived either digitally or by analogue means (the only video output is HDMI).
- Multimedia functionality is pretty good. You can play files from USB-connected storage or SD cards and network stream (you'll need to add a dongle for wi-fi) either from or to other DLNA–compatible devices including recordings. However, some popular formats such as AVI are not supported by the latter.
- SD and hi-def picture quality is stable and uncompromised.

Cons

- The 8-day Guideplus+ EPG looks rather basic these days compared to the glossy efforts found on competing boxes. Also dated (though soon to be remedied we're told) is the inclusion of the outgoing Viera Cast smart TV portal rather than Viera Connect so, while you get the likes of Acetrax, YouTube and Twitter, there's no BBC iPlayer (yet).
- The biggest disappointment is that you can't record TV while using Viera Cast or playing media files.



HCC VERDICT
Panasonic DMR-HW100
£300 Approx
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

In Brief

Batman: Arkham City (Xbox 360)
Warner Bros. Interactive
£50 Approx



Sandbox gameplay and a side-quest allowing Live-connected gamers to play as Catwoman are just two of the many thrills in this successor to Arkham Asylum. Add improved graphics and gameplay and you have an unmissable superhero title

1 2 3 4 **5**

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Audio unleashed

Martin Pipe sports from hi-tech headphones

Headphone brand Sennheiser may be German, but these particular wireless 'cans' have a British connection. At the heart of the Bluetooth 2.1 electronics that allow these 'phones to communicate wirelessly with a mobile phone or 'dongle' is APT-x technology, designed by Cambridge-based CSR. This is a high-quality audio codec designed for point-to-point wireless links – specifically those using Bluetooth's A2DP 'profile'.

Lightweight and comfortable to wear, the PX360BT headphones are fully-enclosed sealed types, and their padded cups fit around your ears, shielding them from the hustle of the outside world. A 'noise-cancelling' function is therefore not needed.

Pros

- Bluetooth AVRCP support means you can operate the transport features of your source device with controls sited on the rear of the right-hand 'phone.
- The rechargeable lithium-polymer battery offers a generous battery life of up to 10 hours. The PX360BTs can also be used as 'corded' headphones courtesy of a supplied 1.4m cable. No battery is needed here.
- Sound quality is excellent, with precise stereo imaging. It's clear and detailed, although perhaps a little bass-shy.
- The wireless range is claimed to be 10m, and I achieved around eight in a less-than-ideal environment.

Cons

- If your audio device doesn't support APT-x, you'll need a 'dongle' – and that's not included. Of course, A2DP's 'standard' SBC audio codec, which you'll find on many mobile phones, is supported by the PX360BTs. APT-x is, however, the better-quality option.



Easy listening: At 179g, these cans are light on the ear

HCC VERDICT
Sennheiser PX360BT
£190 Approx
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

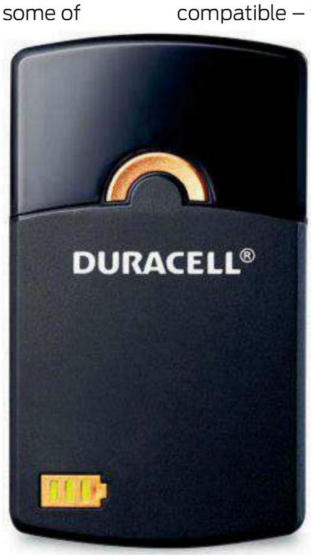
DURACELL PORTABLE CHARGER → £40 Approx → www.duracelldirect.co.uk

Take charge of your life

Martin Pipe stops worrying about battery drain

Smartphones, bless 'em. They do the jobs of a personal media player, digital camera, touchscreen remote, handheld games console, satnav and phone – and all in one pocketable unit. Yet unfortunately, some of the smartphones that conveniently replace these items will barely last out the day before a battery charge is needed.

Until the industry addresses the problem, Duracell's new portable USB charger is an option. It's an 1800mAh battery pack with integrated charger that hooks up to your smartphone (or other device) via USB so you can recharge or resume using it.



Pros

- Works well – a veritable lifeline for smartphone users, with up to five hours of extra talktime (or movies!). Other devices are also compatible – for example my M-Audio Microtrack 24/96 portable audio recorder, which is suffering from a deteriorating internal battery.
- Two USB ports allow different devices to be simultaneously charged or used. Note that the use of multiple devices will of course affect battery drain, and the usage time you can expect
- Three LEDs provide at-a-glance indication of remaining battery capacity or charging status.

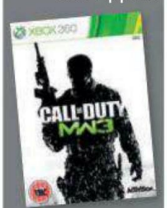
Cons

- The internal 3.7-volt lithium-ion cells (which claims to yield 600 or so charge/recharge cycles) are not themselves replaceable – the unit's case is sealed, rather than screwed together. Effectively, that makes this a 'throwaway' product.
- The cable supplied with the Duracell charger has a 'micro' USB plug, necessitating a rather fragile (and easy-to-lose) adaptor for standard mini USB plugs. Duracell really should provide cables for both.

HCC VERDICT
Duracell Portable 5-hour Charger
£40 Approx
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

In Brief

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (Xbox 360)
Activision
£50 Approx



The world's biggest entertainment franchise reigns supreme with this explosive trilogy finale. The single-player mode is a little short, but raucous. Meanwhile the multiplayer is as comprehensive and expansive as ever. Magnificent stuff

1 2 3 **4** 5

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Sub/sat system shows Craft

Steve May auditions an unashamedly upmarket sub/sat system



Build quality is what you'd expect for the premium price

AV/CV

PRODUCT: High-end sub/sat 5.1 system

POSITION: The mid-range RooTs system

PEERS: B&W MT25 5.1; Monitor Audio Apex 5.1; Paradigm MilleniaOne

SpeakerCraft is not the first brand that comes to mind when short-listing designer hi-fi. The company, best known as a purveyor of in-wall and in-ceiling speakers, has an image that's more plasterboard than posh. But that's about to change with Its new RooTs loudspeakers that strive to impress. The piano gloss cabinets (in black or white) have a quality finish that would be a crime to hide away. The sub is especially handsome.

The system reviewed here comprises the aforementioned head-turning 310 sub (£1,050), four 450 satellites (£525 a pair) and a CC centre channel (£350). Total system cost is around £2,450.

The weighty 450s feature a 4.5in paper cone woofer and 0.75in silk dome tweeter. They can be wall-mounted, but come with little rubber feet for bookshelf use.

The dedicated CC centre speaker incorporates two of the 4.5in woofers separated by the same silk dome tweeter; it's a tonal match for its sibling boxes. All of the enclosures have detachable grilles.

After several days of movies and music, I was left in no doubt that the star of the show is the 310 subwoofer. It's a versatile depth-charger that means business.

Connectivity is extensive. In addition to a pair of phono line inputs, there's a loop-through allowing other subwoofers to be daisy-chained if you need bass re-enforcement. Also supplied are speaker-level connections with high-grade binding posts, and a 12V trigger input offering useful system control from an AVR or amp.

For this audition, I ran the system in a standard 5.1 configuration with a mono line-level LFE input. Consequently, there was no need to power the sub up and down, as it auto wakes when a signal comes down the line. Sensitivity is variable, to reduce the chance of the sub falling asleep mid-movie.

The RooTs sub packs some decent DSP, too. There are presets for Loud, Normal, Clean, Night 1, 2, 3, plus a trio of EQ settings. The Deep mode combines a linear descent from 30Hz with a gentle boost just above. Normal is linear between 33Hz to 65Hz, with a predictably gradual roll-off. Punch rolls off the lower ranges more overtly, to create more slam.

Invasion of RooT 66

The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix for *Battle: LA* is a torture test of dynamics and steerage, but this system wore this alien invasion chaos well, taking the sudden dramatic retort of weapons fire, smooth, sharp panning and explosions in its stride, with the low-reaching subwoofer providing a thumping heartbeat to the satellites.

Although ostensibly part of a sub/sat package, the 450s are actually full-throated. They get excited at 50Hz and reach up high. This makes them a deal more useful than lesser satellites when it comes to music replay.

They do require some management, though. Vocals can have a chandelier sharpness. The *avant-garde* jazz of HYPS (Chaotic Planet, Pony Canyon CD) features a percussive attack that's a little too edgy through these diminutive boxes.

The good news is that this can be tamed with a little re-equalisation. I found that engaging THX Music post-processing at my AVR end took the edge off the top.

If you've been hankering after an eclectic, yet stylish, sound system, audition these gorgeous boxes. They're easy to accommodate, are distinctly individual and the subwoofer is out of this world



Specifications

RooTs 450

Drive Units: 1 x 4.5in paper cone woofer; 1 x 0.75in silk dome tweeter
Enclosure: Ported bookshelf design
Frequency Response: N/A
Sensitivity: 88dB
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 232 (w) x 156(h) x 162(d)mm

RooTs CC Centre

Drive Units: 2 x 4.5in paper cone woofers; 1 x 0.75in silk dome tweeter
Enclosure: Ported horizontal design
Frequency Response: 75Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 85dB
Power Handling: 60W
Dimensions: 435 (w) x 156(h) x 159(d)mm

RooTs 310 sub

Drive Unit: 10in full pressed paper cone
Enclosure: Ported
Frequency Response: 30Hz-100Hz
On board power: 300W
Dimensions: 406(w) x 361(h) x 399(d)mm
Weight: 16kg
Connections: Phono line-level; speaker-level binding posts; 12V trigger



HCC VERDICT

SpeakerCraft RooTs 5.1
£2,450 approx

Highs: Exquisitely finished enclosures; awesome subwoofer with good connections; full-range sats;
Lows: The bookshelf 450s are a little toppy, and can sound a tad boxy

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

worldhifi.net



The envelope pushes right back

Sony's top-of-the-line 55in HX923 series LED TV is ambitious in terms of design and specification. But that may be a problem, says **Steve May**



Sound boost: The lean-back stand incorporates three woofers and delivers a better-than average audio performance

Sony's KDL-55HX923 is nothing short of spectacular. With a skyscraper-inspired glass frontage and (optional) smart Monolithic Design stand, this TV is certain to attract admiring glances. But there's more to this thin 3D screen than good looks. Beneath the hood lurks a wealth of picture processing tech, plus a few surprises.

Styled to impress

Build quality is exemplary and the stand (yours for around £230) is sleek and ingenious. Not only does it allow the TV to recline artfully from low-profile furniture, but it also doubles as an upgraded sound system. While you can use the panel's integrated speakers, once on the stand, the TV prompts you to use the external audio system instead. A short lead links the two, taking advantage of HDMI's Audio Return Channel.

The standard quota of connections is available: four HDMI inputs, component and Scart via adaptor, two side-mounted USBs, a CI Slot, PC input and Ethernet. Wi-fi is built in, requiring no extra dongle.

Naturally this HX923 model has 'net-connected smarts. **The newly christened Sony Entertainment Network offers more streaming IPTV than you can shake a router at**, and includes catch-up services from the BBC iPlayer and Demand 5, plus YouTube, LOVEFiLM, DailyMotion and much more. In total there are over two-dozen streaming channels.

Sony also offers a wide selection of on-demand movies in both SD and HD, via its Movies Unlimited portal. Choose hi-def and Sony's Movies Unlimited service tailors an appropriate download from its servers based on your broadband speed. The set also offers access to the brand's Music Unlimited music subscription service.

Local file support is good. Media playback from USB covers most major file types, including HD MKVs. Unfortunately, from a NAS, this helpful compatibility is diminished somewhat. Still, MP3s playback with album art, and the trio of woofers in the overgrown stand do a decent job of spreading the stereo soundstage wide. An integrated 30W S-Force digital amp ensures that there's no shortage of welly from the telly.

While Sony's smart TVs aren't particularly 'appy', they do offer widgets for Skype video calling, Facebook and Twitter, the latter being one of the better implementations available.

The set offers other niceties too: Track ID uses the Sony-owned Gracenote database to identify background music used in TV shows and movies. Plug in an external USB hard drive and you can also timeshift programmes to watch later. Sit too close and the TV will even flash a written warning to move back.

Unfortunately, while the KDL-55HX923 is feature-rich, the overall proposition becomes less tempting when you factor in picture quality.



Does the job: Sony's handset is easy to use, but we'd prefer something a little more weighty

Picture performance

On the plus side, this Sony doesn't lack visual impact. The low-reflectivity OptiContrast panel is wafer-thin, thanks to Intelligent Peak LED edge-lighting. Effective local dimming helps deliver excellent black level control. The panel is also protected by Gorilla Glass.

Moving image clarity is managed by Sony's top-rated Motionflow XR800 framerate enhancer. This is the zippiest version of Motionflow in the Sony fleet, and its ability to eradicate blur is nothing short of remarkable. With Standard mode engaged, the set can display around 950-1000 lines of crisp moving detail. Step up to Clear and then Clear 2, and there's zero perceived loss of motion resolution. Be warned though, Motionflow does tend to create its own artefacts, seen as a smudgy outline around certain moving objects.

Of course, you can always turn Motionflow off completely (as I like to do for film material), but then

Specifications

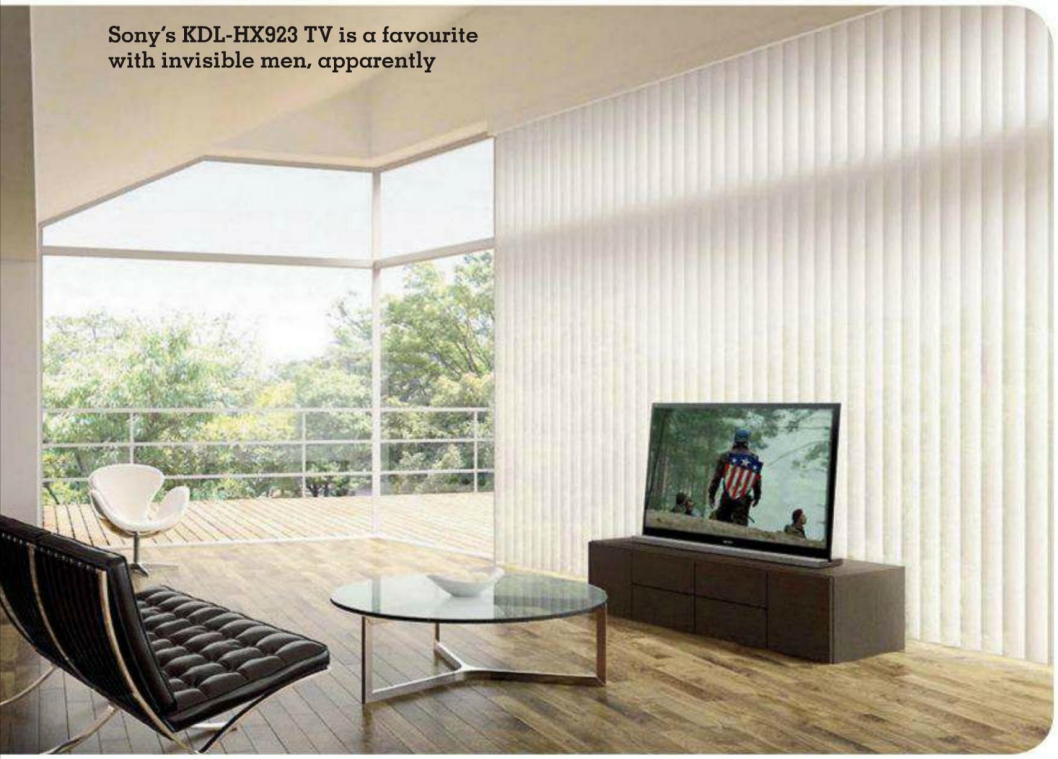
3D: YES Active shutter
Full HD: YES 1080p/24
Tuner: YES Freeview HD, analogue, DVB-C cable, CI slot
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES four v.14 (two side-mounted)
PC input: YES PC D-Sub
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Sound: 3 x 10W
Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 'Mega'
Dimensions (off stand): 1,290(w) x 770(h) x 40(d)mm
Weight (off stand): 26.1kg
Features: Built-in Wi-Fi; Intelligent Peak LED backlight; Motionflow XR800; X-Reality PRO picture engine; Sony Entertainment Network services; Skype; HDMI CEC; USB hard drive recording; USB media playback (JPEG, MP3, AVI, MKV, AVCHD); Gracenote-powered Track ID; Scart; optical digital output; Ethernet LAN; two pairs of 3D spex provided

AV/CV

PRODUCT: 55in diva from Sony's flagship 3D LED TV range

POSITION: At the top of the Sony 3DTV range under 60 and 65in models

PEERS: Samsung UE55D8000; Panasonic TX-P55VT30; Toshiba 55WL863



Sony's KDL-HX923 TV is a favourite with invisible men, apparently

moving image clarity drops back to around 650 lines.

More image manipulation is wrapped up in a two-chip blanket Sony calls the X-Reality PRO picture engine. There's a host of picture de-fizzers on tap here, some of which improve streaming video quality, while others don't. Avoid cranking up the Resolution mode (in the advanced menus) as this only seems to emphasise mosquito noise.

For casual users, a Scene Select setting is available to optimise the panel for different types of content. This super-preset mode features pre-tailored packages entitled Cinema, Sports, Games, General, Music and Photo.

Overall, I was satisfied with the general tone and fidelity of the HX923's pictures. **Freeview's HD channels look sharp, and challenging Blu-rays like Jurassic Park prove to be both dynamic and immersive.** In a full HD test sequence shot around the Tokyo Tower at night, the latter remains gaudily bright, with fine shadow detail stretching back into the night.

That said, dark scenes do suffer from haloing, seen as a sudden glow around onscreen graphics, typically if you pause a recording or select an new AV input.

Off-axis viewing is also poor. The set dramatically drops contrast and colour when viewed from the side.

But the most curious thing about the KDL-55HX923 is the light, watery strip running vertically up both the left and right edges of the screen. This is particularly noticeable on darker scenes.

I tried to dial this edge-effect out, by changing processing modes and tweaking picture levels – all without significant success. Ultimately, Sony confirmed that what I had spotted was a 'structural characteristic', resulting in a 'visible un-uniformity.'

While visible un-uniformities sound cool, they're not what you want to see on a 55in TV that costs upwards of £3K. Well, I don't.

The set's 3D capabilities are actually rather accomplished. Sure, the TV still suffers from double imaging crosstalk effects, but on the plus side its stereoscopic images are refreshingly bright and colourful. I've come to the conclusion that it's just not worth getting vexed about flaws in 3DTV presentation – only small children watching *Tangled* for the umpteenth time will see them. And they could care less.

Very un-uniform

The KDL-HX923 is an undeniably beautiful screen capable of crisp detail, deep blacks and vibrant hues. It teases just how good a Sony TV can look. But can you live with that bizarrely visible un-uniformity mentioned earlier? That is the £2,800 question

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

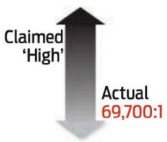


White screen: We measured 92W with the Sony displaying our 100IRE white screen



Test footage: Consumption averaged 80W during playback – an extraordinary figure for a 55in screen

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: A solid contrast measurement out of the box, with a luminance of 20.3fL. Post calibration coaxed it to 73,000:1

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: ISF controls enable calibration to 6,500K, but the Warm 2 setting (with Cinema) is fairly accurate
Cool: 11,500K
Neutral: 8,800K
Warm 1: 7,700K
Warm 2: 7,100K

Onscreen: 3D Experience



Pick 'n' Mix: Like rival brands, Sony has added a free 3D taster portal to its Smart TV platform – meaning you can check out its 3D talents without having to upgrade your BD player



HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-HX923
£2,800 Approx

Highs: Impeccable design; excellent motion clarity; content-rich IPTV service

Lows: 'Visible un-uniformity'; inconsistent media file playback

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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AV austerity

Lacking in features you might expect, Onkyo's first 3D Blu-ray player appears outgunned on every flank, says **Steve May**

Onkyo has carved itself a formidable niche in the lower-to-midrange AV receiver market by following a Tesco-like philosophy: piling features high and keeping prices low. But that's not the route it's taken with disc players. Here the company has played a purist card, which is admirable yet fraught with commercial peril.

As evidence I offer you the BD-SP809: a high-priced Blu-ray player with Spartan specification. This may be the first 3D–compatible Blu-ray player from the brand, but it lacks both the Smart TV chops of cheaper connected decks and the audiophile support (SACD, DVD Audio) found on contenders in the fast-rising Universal end of the market – such as the Yamaha BD-A1010, reviewed on page 80.

More significantly, and despite a stamp of THX approval, I think it lacks the weight and sonic rigidity of its own BD-SP808 predecessor. But more on that later...

Double displays

The BD-SP809 looks smart enough. The fascia is designed to match the cosmetics of the brand's AVRs (you can get it in both black and silver) and connectivity is solid. There are two HDMI outputs, with the sub intended to send lossless audio (Dolby TrueHD and DTS HD Master Audio) to legacy (non 3D capable) AV receivers while the main feeds a shiny new 3D display. Of course, you can also use the sub feed for a second display if required.

AV/CV

PRODUCT: THX certified 3D Blu-ray player

POSITION: Replacement for the BD-SP808

PEERS: Cambridge Audio Azur 651; Denon DBP2012; Yamaha BD-A1010

This HDMI duo is joined by optical and coaxial digital outputs, component and phono AV connections, USB, Ethernet, RS232 port and a IR repeater mini-jack. The USB input is located on the rear, there's no front-facing option for more convenient local playback. Last year's SD card slot has been retired.

Predictably the component output is a waste of space, as it will only output Blu-ray in standard definition, in accordance with the AACS copy protection rules.

Graphic violence

Powered up, there's not a great deal to talk about. The BD-SP809's Home interface is bland to the point of nihilistic. It offers just four graphics floating in a sea of black – Disc, USB, Home Network and Settings,

→ Specifications

3D: *YES*
Upscaling: *YES* to 1080p
Multiregion: *NO* Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: *YES* 2 x v1.4
Component: *YES*
Multichannel analogue outputs: *NO* Stereo only
Digital audio: *YES* 1 x coaxial/ 1 x optical
SACD/DVD-A: *NO/NO*
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD decoding: *YES/YES*
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD bitstream: *YES/YES*
Profile 2.0: *YES* with 1GB internal memory
Dimensions: 435(w) x 104(h) x 313(d)mm
Weight: 4.7kg
Features: Ethernet; USB with media playback; THX certification; DLNA streaming; RS232; IR input and output; gold-plated connections; upscaling via Marvell Qdeo technology; independent circuit blocks for audio and video



The brushed fascia will look classy in your AV rack



Mismatch: Unlike the player, the handset looks and feels lightweight

each of which leads to terse text sub-menus. Even though this deck shouts about DLNA compliancy, its streaming abilities are underwhelming. From USB, it played AVI, MP3 and WMA files from a test folder of common suffixes, but ignored MKV-wrapped content and FLAC files. It does, however, play DivX HD, which bizarrely is just another name for an h.264 encode in a Matroska media container. Across my network, video support fell away, leaving only MP3 and WMA files playable.

There are no brownie points for presentational skills either. Music plays back *sans* album art, with just a track listing, and AVI SRT subtitles are ignored.

It's disappointing that Onkyo hasn't progressed with its media compliancy since its last Blu-ray deck, but then this casual disinterest also applies to its AVR range. Perhaps the problem is more philosophical than technical?

Performance

In terms of straight AV performance the BD-SP809 can be considered a cut above and there's integrity to the player's build, with separate blocks for video and audio circuitry plus an anti resonance top cover.

CD replay is clinically comparable with like-minded hardware, but for whatever reason the BD-SP809 didn't cause the hairs on the back of my neck to raise up in quite the same appreciative way as they did with its forebear.

Hi-def image quality is fine both in 2D and 3D, with its primary output producing pictures free of banding, undue mosquito noise and related artefacts. The Marvell Qdeo processor at work beneath the lid is far from shoddy, and here it delivers where it counts. 3D discs play exactly as expected. I auditioned the deck with both 3D projectors and TVs, and encountered no incompatibilities or curiosities.

Conclusion

There's plenty to like about this Onkyo player, but ultimately it left me feeling rather nonplussed. You see, I really enjoyed its predecessor, the BD-SP808. Even a year ago, that model was lacking niceties, but it compensated with raw performance. Somehow this model just doesn't hit the same buttons. Meanwhile, the feature deficit now appears even more marked.

With better buys both below and above it, and the Blu-ray market evolving at lightning speed, this entrant is destined to find itself seriously marginalised ●



→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

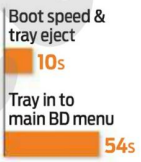


Idling: In standby the Onkyo uses less than 1W, but sucks 17W when it's ticking over



Powered: There's an increase in consumption when playing a movie, but nothing to get worried about

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Not the fastest to load our standard BD disc

Onscreen: Menu



Text message: Onkyo has yet to adopt that all-singing, all-dancing menus of its mass market rivals – the BD-SP809's menus are predominantly text-based



HCC VERDICT

Onkyo BD-SP809
£500 Approx

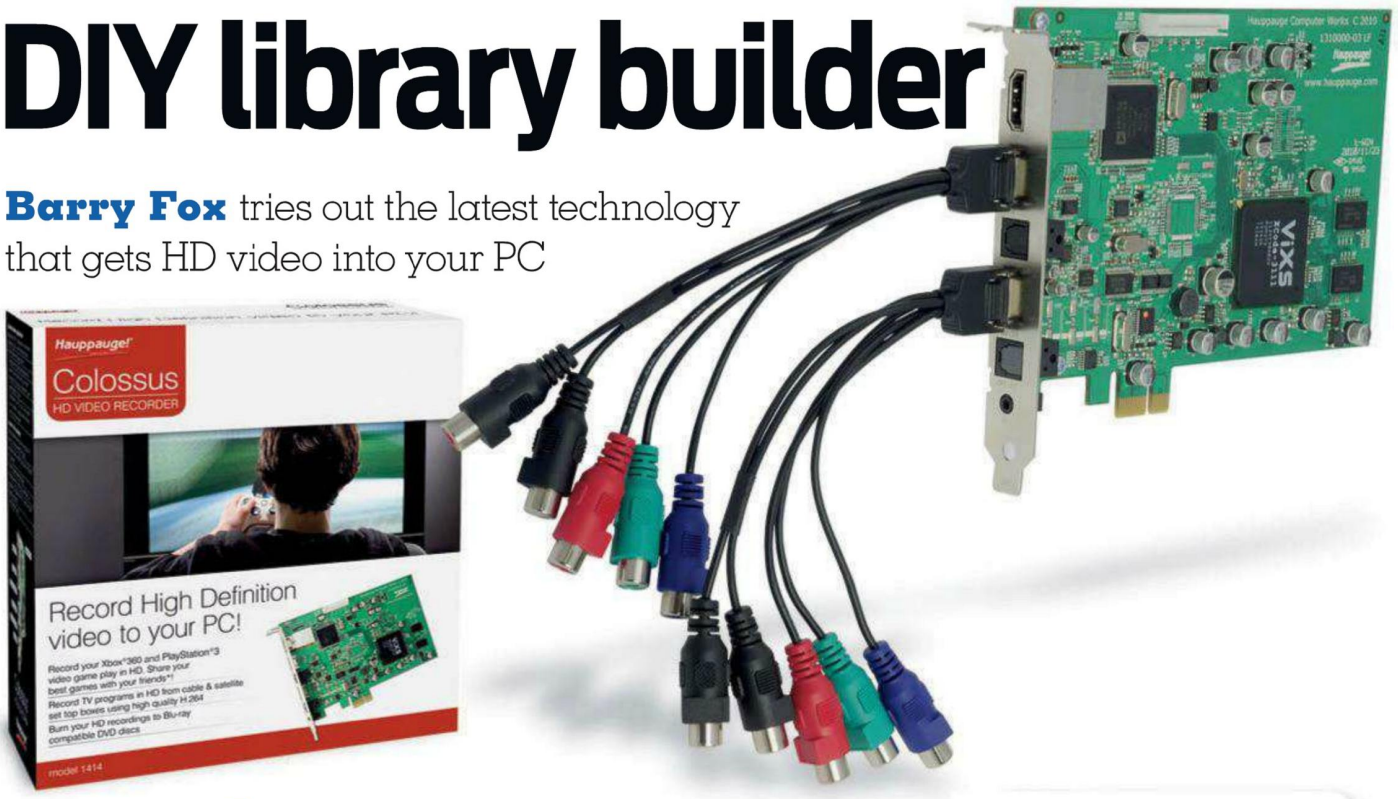
Highs: AV performance; twin HDMI outputs; build quality and design
Lows: No SACD or DVD-A playback; mismatched remote control; limited media streaming

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Home-cinema-choice.net

DIY library builder

Barry Fox tries out the latest technology that gets HD video into your PC



Plug-u-like: Ports directly into a PC's PCI Express slot

A couple of years ago Hauppauge launched its HD-PVR, described as the 'world's first high-definition video recorder for making real-time H.264 compressed recordings at resolutions up to 1080i.'

Yet it wasn't really a PVR at all, because there was no hard disk. The nondescript box plugged into a PC by USB cable and recorded to the PC's HDD. Software from ArcSoft supplied with the HD-PVR then burned 1080i video to a blank DVD in the AVCHD format. What made the PVR special was that it connected by analogue component and digital audio SP/DIF optical, rather than by HDMI, allowing unencrypted 1080i content (say, gameplay from a PS3) to be archived.

Now Hauppauge has come up with a more elegant approach with some added features, at similar cost, except that Colossus plugs directly into a standard PCI Express slot inside a PC.

Colossus has its own on-board H.264 compression chips. This means that most of the signal processing is done by the Hauppauge hardware, not the PC's processors. So even a cheap PC can capture and encode 1080i video, without judder, and stutter-free sound, in real time.

The product comes with ArcSoft ShowBiz software, which integrates the Capture, Edit and Produce functions that were separately handled by the ArcSoft Connect and Total Media Extreme packages on the original HD-PVR. Personally I found the Showbiz edit software awkward and unintuitive, with poor Help. But once you get the hang of it you can edit out unwanted sequences, like commercials, from a recording before burning.

Digital

As well as the component and optical inputs, Colossus also has HDMI connectors. I tested and confirmed that – exactly as intended – the HDMI connection from a PS3 does not deliver content to Colossus. The same was true of an HDMI connection from a Panasonic BD deck. The screen just blanks.

However the HDMI connection to an HD video camera (I tried the Cisco Flip) does work, because the signal is unencrypted. So the HDMI input on Colossus is to my knowledge the first time it has been possible to capture the HD HDMI stream from the camera, with easy raw editing, and the option of tighter PC-based editing before burning to DVD.

Most significantly, practical tests confirmed that component video and optical audio connections from a PS3, even when playing a Blu-ray Disc, deliver unprotected HD to Colossus. As with previous reviews, I'm not advocating copyright abuse, just simply testing advertised features of hardware and software that is on open sale. What the content industry then tries to do about open sale is another matter...

AV/CV

PRODUCT: PCI slot PC HD capture card

POSITION: Companion product to the HD-PVR

PEERS: Hauppauge's own HD-PVR

→ Specifications

Recording format: Up to 1080i from component video (YCrCb or YPrPb)
Recording datarate: From 1 to 20Mbits/s (user selectable in the ArcSoft ShowBiz application)
Video encoder: H.264 AVCHD
Audio format: AC-3 recording from AC-3 source, AAC audio encoding from PCM source
Standards: NTSC or PAL
System Requirements: Dual core CPU 2.0GHz or faster; Windows 7 (32 and 64bit), Windows Vista or Windows XP service pack 2 (32bit); graphics with 256MB memory (or greater); PCI Express x1 slot, sound card for audio playback; CD-ROM drive software installation
Bundled software applications: ArcSoft ShowBiz; Hauppauge WinTV v7
Inputs and outputs: Component and HDMI inputs (HDMI input for use with un-encrypted HDMI video sources); Left/Right phono audio input; component video output; Left/Right phono audio output; optical audio input and loop-through output; IR Blaster output

HCC VERDICT

Hauppauge Colossus
£150 Approx

Highs: Captures HD video from component; comprehensive software package
Lows: Software can be unfriendly; needs a very powerful PC

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5


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Taking Aventage

Richard Stevenson test drives Yamaha's new range-topping universal 3D Blu-ray player – and ends up watching more of Avatar than he ever wanted to



Yamaha's new Aventage series is a crop of top-flight AV components that the blurb says is a dramatic and inspired leap forward. They are clearly not talking cosmetically, because the flagship BD-A1010 networked Blu-ray player is a chunky and traditional-looking beast. I quite like it.

Under the hood is where it counts, though, and here Yamaha's engineers have given this player something of an audio-visual design flourish. 3D Blu-ray playback and a pair of simultaneous v1.4 HDMI outputs are the headline video features, but DVD-Audio and SACD playback will appeal to true audiophiles as will the player's 192kHz/24bit DACs and Pure Direct mode.

The BD-A1010 also sports USB inputs front and rear, and Ethernet for full network functionality. Like the growing range of Smart TVs there is a 'home' screen that gives seamless access to your DLNA servers and YouTube. I'm guessing the number of services appearing on this home page will increase as Yamaha does deals with other service providers.

Operation and control are super-slick using the new Yamaha GUI. The menus are logical and scroll seamlessly through the pages.

Performance

One of the occasional problems with review samples is that you end up being the bug swat. The BD-A1010's power-up routine occasionally took about a minute, other times it would boot up in seconds and the DLNA functionality had issues. The deck found all three DLNA servers on my network and displayed all music titles in each, but simply refused to actually play anything. I am sure these bugs will get squelched in firmware updates, possibly before you read this, but it is something to look out for if you get a demo.

Silver service: The BD-A1010 offers DVD-A and SACD playback, too

BD playback, straight out of the box with no picture modifications, is nicely balanced. The image is not as overtly punchy or dynamic as some but the **black levels and shadow details are excellent, while tones are rich and deep**. There is very little in the way of processing noise, either, even without the noise filter engaged.

What lets the Yamaha's 2D image down is its less than stellar scrolling ability. Diagonal pans over complex scenes are the most difficult for any player and the BD-A1010 struggles to maintain a smooth scanning image. In the final scene from *Star Trek XI*, where the camera pans down through the ranks of Star Fleet officers, the picture stumbles and judders. Straight left-right pans are smoother but a slight judder remains that will be visible on larger screens.

Strangely, the juddering is less noticeable with 3D content played on a 46in TV. The picture maintains its sumptuous film-like dynamic, and the TV's extra brightness over my projector means that none of the Yamaha's detailing is lost in the glasses. There is not massive user control over 3D imaging built into the BD-A1010, but as I managed to sit through nearly 30 minutes of *Avatar* I can only salute this player's ability to make 3D highly watchable

AV/CV

PRODUCT: Networked universal disc-player

POSITION: Top of Yamaha's Aventage lineup

PEERS: Denon DBP-1611; Pioneer BDP-LX55; Onkyo BD-SP809

→ Tech Labs

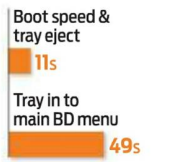
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: The Yamaha is more power-hungry than some of its mass market rivals

Powered: Spinning a disc, the BD-A1010 draws 17W

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: This was our fastest measurement – but the boot time did vary

→ Specifications

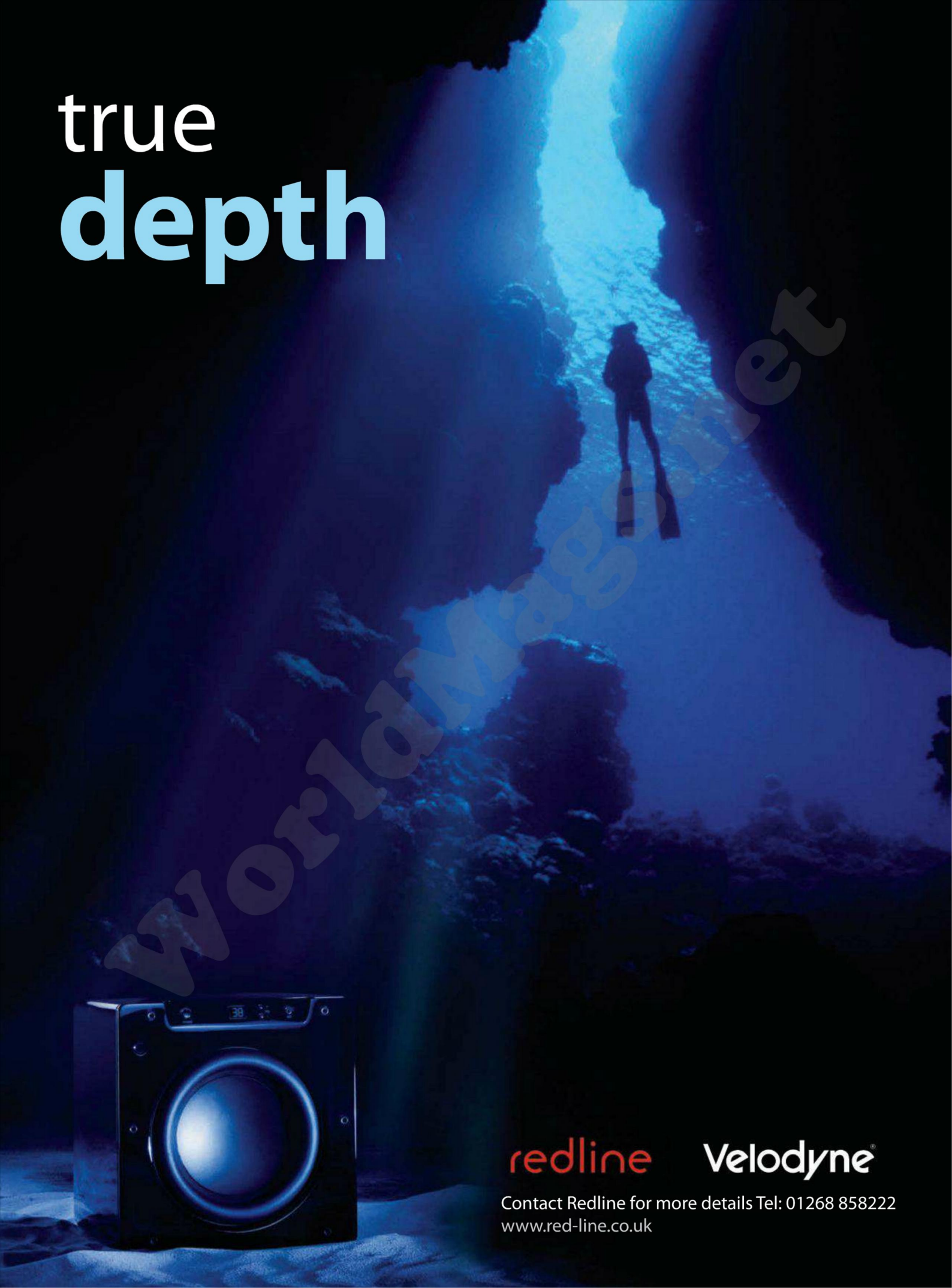
3D: YES Upscaling: YES 1080p
Multiregion: NO Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES 2 x HDMI v1.4 outputs
Component: YES 1 x output
Multichannel analogue: YES 7.1 phono
Digital audio: YES optical and coaxial outputs
SACD/DVD-A: YES both
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: YES
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: YES
Profile 2.0: YES with 1GB storage
Dimensions: 435(w) x 96(h) x 316(d)mm Weight: 4kg
Features: Ethernet; DLNA support; online portal including YouTube; 2 x USB; 194/24bit DACs; iPhone App control; Android App (on the way); RS232 port

HCC VERDICT

Yamaha BD-A1010
£500 Approx

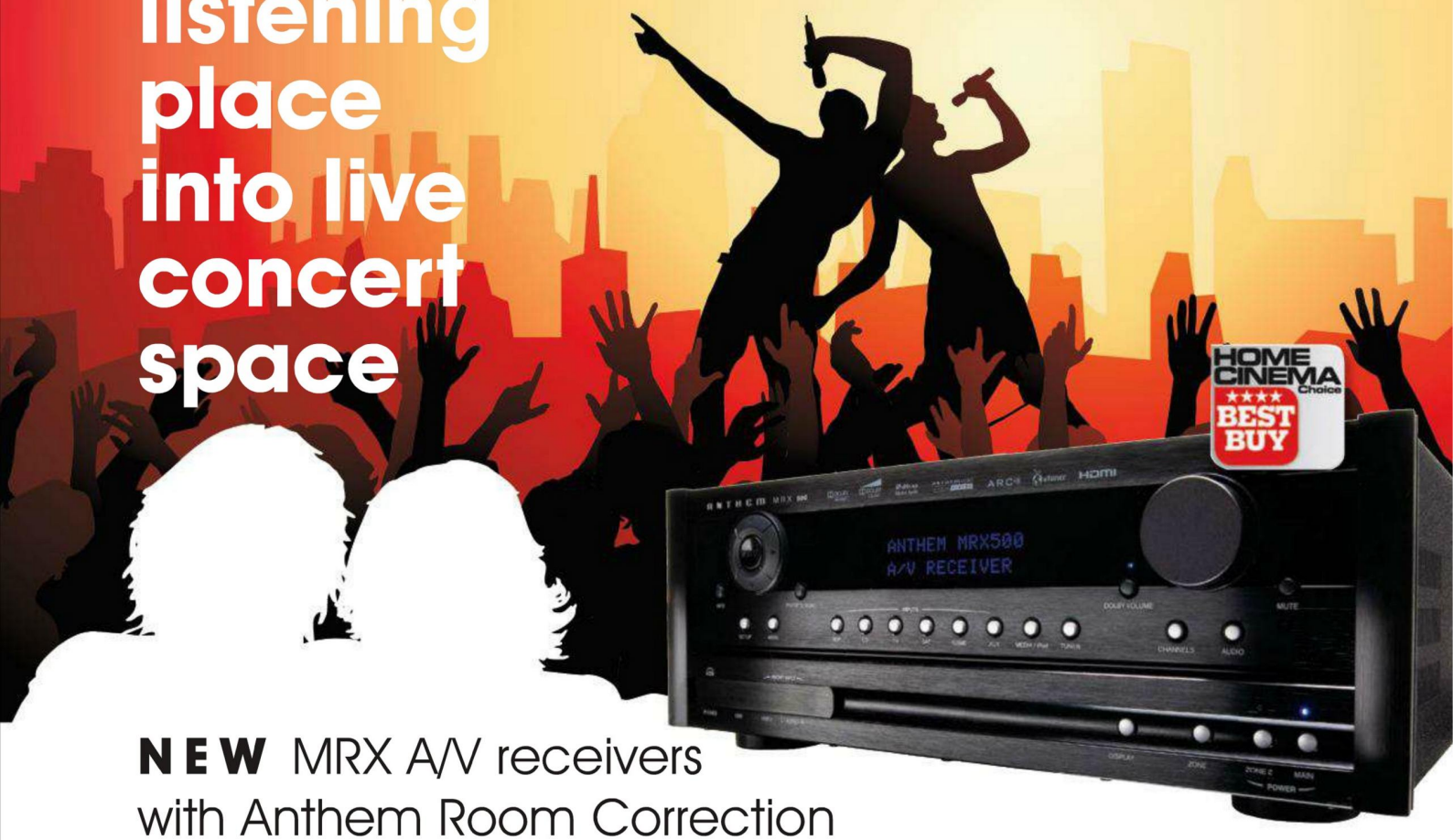
Highs: Universal disc playback; networked; film-like picture; twin HDMI outs
Lows: Noticeable panning judder on a projector screen; bugs need fixing

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5


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Richard Stevenson MRX 700 Review HCC #195

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Infidelity **Kingston**
Unilet Sound & Vision **New Malden**
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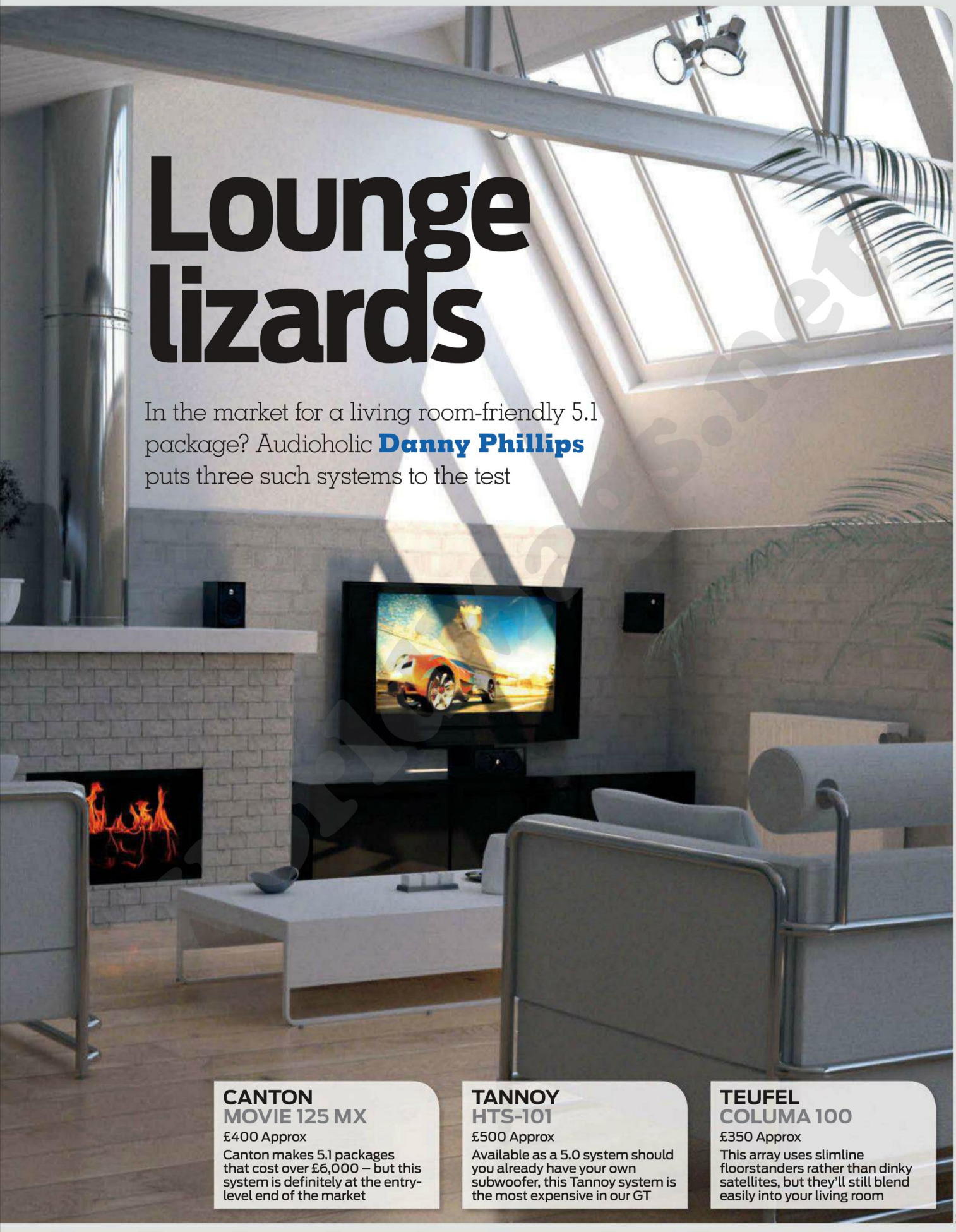
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Lounge lizards

In the market for a living room-friendly 5.1 package? Audioholic **Danny Phillips** puts three such systems to the test



CANTON
MOVIE 125 MX
£400 Approx
Canton makes 5.1 packages that cost over £6,000 – but this system is definitely at the entry-level end of the market

TANNOY
HTS-101
£500 Approx
Available as a 5.0 system should you already have your own subwoofer, this Tannoy system is the most expensive in our GT

TEUFEL
COLUMA 100
£350 Approx
This array uses slimline floorstanders rather than dinky satellites, but they'll still blend easily into your living room

Canton's coherent collection

This sub/sat system delivers a tonally-matched soundfield that's pleasing on the ear

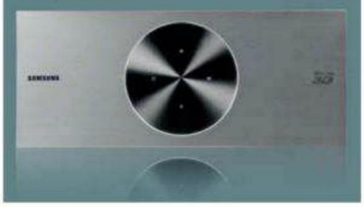


Partner with:

Samsung BD-D7500, £250 approx

Canton's 125 MX system is supplied with the 'Movie Mount' wall-mounting kit, giving you more options for placement. If you do decide to go down this route, Samsung's wall-mountable BD-D7500 makes an ideal Blu-ray partner. Claiming to be the world's thinnest BD-spinner, it's available in both gloss black and silver finishes, and looks achingly cool.

Its AV performance is up to scratch, too. In addition to a healthy array of Smart features, including VOD from BBC iPlayer and Acetrax, built-in wi-fi and decent file playback over USB, the slimline deck offers precise Blu-ray images and fast loading times.



Canton's Movie range includes systems of all shapes, sizes and prices, but the 125 MX is very much at the entry-level end of the spectrum. Convenience is the word from the get-go – the four satellites, a larger centre speaker and powered sub are all squeezed into a packing single box, plus the compact size of each speaker ensures maximum living-room discretion.

First impressions are positive. The satellites stand 115mm tall and are heavier than expected, sturdily constructed from a lovely high-gloss black enclosure (also available in silver or white). Luxurious is pushing it perhaps, but build quality is certainly impressive.

Curved edges communicate a sense of elegance, and through the metal mesh on the front you can glimpse the separate 3.15in woofer and 0.6in tweeter – that's quite an engineering feat on sats of this size.

So far so good, but it's a pity that Canton has made it so hard to connect speaker cables. Two fiddly springclip terminals are sunk into a deep recess on the back, making it difficult to guide the wire through the holes and clamp it shut. And the name for this cable connection system? Easy Link. Go figure.

Despite similarly fiddly connections on the centre speaker, its build quality and design is also good and its longer horizontal shape makes it the perfect fit under a TV. Like the other sats it's a two-way closed design, but adds an extra woofer to lend authority to that all-important dialogue.

The subwoofer isn't quite as glamorous as the satellites but far from an eyesore, and carries out its bass-blasting duties with a 140W amplifier and 8in woofer. Connections include low-level cinch and speaker-level binding post inputs.

Installing the satellites is as simple as plonking them on furniture or shelves, but you could invest in Canton's optional floorstands (pictured) or wall-mount them.

Warm it up for a while and the 125 MX is a capable system with BD soundtracks, populating its spacious soundstage with hard-hitting effects and crisp detail. It's an engaging experience, thanks to the way it makes the sound smooth and easy without compromising on dynamism.

Caption: The subwoofer is tight and punchy, but a bit underpowered

Push it to reasonably loud levels and the Canton remains steadfastly unflustered – high frequencies don't sound bright or edgy, effects sweep from speaker to speaker seamlessly and clear dialogue reproduction ensures actors don't sound like Brando in *The Godfather*.

But the real key to its success is the overall coherence, with nary a trace of tonal variation. And the subwoofer's bass notes lock tightly with the satellites, reinforcing low-end frequencies without overpowering them. Bottom-end is tight and punchy, which gives action scenes a sense of depth and drive, but this is not a sub that's going to shake your foundations.

Overall the Canton delivers an exciting and articulate performance that's more mature than you might expect. It handles loud volumes with poise, gives dialogue a natural, full-bodied flavour and has no trouble digging out detail. Its build quality and design – aside from the awkward speaker cable connections – is satisfying, all of which makes it an absolute bargain at £400.

Little black beauties

Tannoy's gloss-finished array scores well on design and performance



HF hero: All the surround speakers use Tannoy's WideBand tweeter

Tannoy's HTS-101 aims to replicate the experience of a full-size speaker system from small-scale cabinets. No mean feat, but with the tech on board I wouldn't be surprised if it manages it.

This system comprises four identical satellites, each one measuring 160mm high, a centre speaker and the HTS Subwoofer. The sats and centre can be purchased separately as the HTS 5.0 if you already own a woofer.

Of course, the beauty of compact speakers is their ability to slide discreetly into your lounge and on that score the HTS-101 is perfect. The design is nondescript – each one is just a black box – but the gloss finish means they get away with it.

Build quality is fantastic. The satellite cabinets are fashioned from high-density real wood fibre, giving them a weight of 1.4kg each. This rigid construction continues on the centre speaker, which is slightly larger due to the inclusion of an extra midrange driver. All of the satellites feature sturdy binding posts on the back, which, unlike the Canton and Teufel speakers, are easy to access.

Given the size of the satellites, it's surprising to find them paired with such a massive subwoofer. At 275mm x 420mm, it's not the sort of sub you can easily hide away, but that's not really a problem thanks to the gorgeous finish, which gives it more panache than many budget models. It's a robust unit, and houses its controls on the rear panel. These include volume, crossover and phase correction.

Like the Canton system, Tannoy has packed both a midrange driver and tweeter into the satellites, rather than settling for a single full-range driver. The 0.75in WideBand tweeter is fashioned from titanium, which should provide a more accurate frequency response than soft dome tweeters, and it's driven by a neodymium magnet system.

The two midrange drivers and tweeter in the centre speaker aim to give dialogue a bit of a leg up while remaining voice-matched to the satellites. The subwoofer, meanwhile, packs a downward-firing 8in long-throw driver and a 100W amp.

Firing up the system, the first thing I noticed was the towering sense of scale it lends to blockbuster movies on Blu-ray. These diminutive boxes work miracles by offering a soundstage that's bigger and more powerful than compact speakers have any right to be. I won't suggest it's a match for a set of floorstanders, but in the world of mid-range compacts they're a class apart.

The size and expansiveness of the soundstage, combined with its muscle and effortless handling of loud volumes, is very impressive. Effects are fired into the room with gusto and have an energetic, attacking quality that makes for a scintillating listen. It's also adept at coaxing detail and delicate ambience from quiet scenes, while high frequencies are remarkably crisp.

Partner with:

Oppo BDP-93EU, £500 approx

Once you've splashed out £500 on Tannoy's sub/sat package, why not dig out the same amount again for one of the best Blu-ray players around – and one with the sonic prowess to make the most of Tannoy's hi-fi heritage.

Oppo's BDP-93EU is an awesome machine, offering playback of both DVD-Audio and Super Audio CD as well as 3D Blu-ray. Build quality is solid – even the packaging is lavish – and the feature count is extensive: dual HDMI outputs, Marvell Qdeo processing, e-SATA port and near faultless DLNA media streaming are among the highlights.



At the lower end of the spectrum, the subwoofer is an agile performer, making the bottom-end sound neither flabby nor overpowering – it simply underpins the action with deep, hard-hitting bass tones. There's a wonderful symbiosis between the sats and the sub too, which leaves no holes in the overall sound.

You can't even catch the Tannoy out when it comes to dialogue – speech sounds clear and life-like, with the midrange driver duo lending a depth to voices.

So, I like the HTS-101 a lot. It may not be the most exciting system to look at, but it sounds superb.

Wilkinson Internet

Standing proud

Designed to match your flatscreen TV, Teufel's towers offer value for money



Baby brother: The centre channel shares the same drivers as the towers, but in a smaller enclosure

As you may have deduced from the name, Teufel's Columa 100 system comes with four column speakers (CL 100 FR) for the front and rear channels. Each one towers 108cm high, and with this extra cabinet volume to play with, Teufel's system is looking to steal a march on similarly-priced compact systems.

The design is swanky and distinctive, with a swoon-worthy black lacquer finish providing the glamour. The towers' central speaker column is flanked on either side by pointed strips with a curved back end and an oval-shaped base. Viewed from the front they look flat, and with a flatpanel-friendly thickness of 8.6cm they're not as imposing as you might think. And for £350, build quality is pleasing.

The centre speaker (CL 100 C) is a mini-me version of the tower, turned horizontally. You get a table-top cradle to rest it on or it can be wall-mounted, The same driver array as the satellites is used to achieve tonal homogeneity.

Like the Canton system I had trouble connecting cables to the gold-plated binding posts on the back due to their awkward positioning within a recess – thankfully this cumbersome duty only has to be carried out once.

The subwoofer of choice is the US 5108/1 SW, which makes it sound like an American battleship. Hopefully it's just as explosive, with a 100W amplifier on board and a 8in long-throw cellulose woofer hoping to dive down to depths of 38Hz.

The columns' driver line-up comprises two newly-designed 2.75in midrange drivers and a 0.75in mesh calotte tweeter. Teufel says it doesn't take much power to make them sing (it recommends an AV receiver of at least 5 x 30W) and as a whole the system is designed to fill rooms of up to 25m².

And sure enough, the Columa 100 delivers thrills a plenty, although it's not the controlled, assured performance we've come to expect from the German brand.

Partner with:

Sony BDP-S480, £150 approx

Tannoy's Columa 100 package offers excellent value-for-money, so Sony's equally wallet-friendly Blu-ray player makes sense as a source component.

This deck delivers remarkable features for its meagre £150 ticket. Perhaps its best asset is its VOD potential. BBC iPlayer, Demand 5, LOVEFiLM and YouTube all lurk alongside Sony's own Entertainment Network, which is stuffed with music and film content. And compatibility with Gracenote database makes CD playback an enjoyable experience.

Pictures are hard to fault. Blu-rays drip with fine detail and colour fidelity is gorgeous. In fact, the only bad thing we can say about the BDP-S480 is that it doesn't feature wi-fi...



With *Inception* on Blu-ray, there's real force behind the effects – you almost cower as the tidal wave pours in and the building collapses – and effects are pinged around the room with a zesty energy.

But all too often the system gets too bright for my liking, making bangs and crashes sound just a little raw, particularly when the volume dial is up high.

It's nowhere near the thin, squeaky sound you might get from a cheapo one-box Blu-ray system but it's not up to the same smooth standards as the Canton or Tannoy packages.

Still, there's lots to admire. During quiet moments it's adept at handling the upper frequencies of Blu-ray soundtracks, picking out gentle tinkling and rustling and giving voices the sort of texture and body that makes them believable.

And the subwoofer is a revelation, shaping low frequencies with an admirable control and punch.

So if you like the look of Teufel's design and price tag, it might be worth an audition, but its sonic shortcomings make the Canton and Tannoy offerings the superior performers here.

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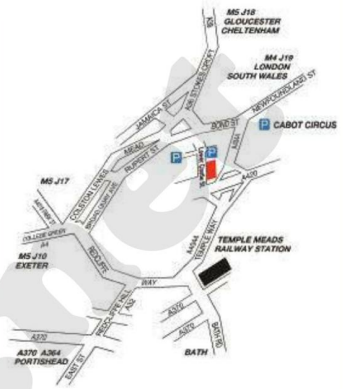
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Final standings

The three systems on test here demonstrate that opting for compact, living room-friendly speakers doesn't mean you have to compromise on performance. Even the smallest speakers can deliver a rousing large-scale home cinema sound, and that's exactly what you get from the Tannoy HTS-101, which scoops top-spot in our shoot-out.

The reason for its success is that it delivers the biggest bang for your buck. It's the system that most convincingly disguises the compact size of its cabinets, making Blu-ray soundtracks sound epic and exciting with their ample power, impressive expansion and spot-on effects placement.

The supplied subwoofer also does a solid job, supporting the satellites with potent, punchy bass, while dialogue from the centre channel has an open and authoritative quality. You can crank your receiver up without having to worry about your ears taking a battering, too. That's not to say its rivals don't do these things – it's just that the Tannoy does them better.

Canton takes a deserved second spot. It's another smooth operator, dishing out thrilling sonics without troubling your eardrums with harshness.

It doesn't quite match the Tannoy's sense of scale and bottom-end punch, but what you have is an accomplished system that offers a cohesive sound, excellent detail reproduction and a stylish design – apart from those fiddly binding posts.

Bringing up the rear is Teufel's Columa 100. This isn't a bad effort, but it struggles to keep a lid on high-frequency brightness more than the Tannoy or Canton. But in every other respect this system impresses – and its subwoofer is the best of the bunch

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Tannoy HTS-101
£500 Approx

Highs: Large-scale sound; good integration between satellite and subwoofer; solid build quality
Lows: Comparatively dull design; not the most affordable option

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

Satellites

Drive units: 1 x 3in paper cone LF driver; 1 x 0.75in titanium WideBand dome tweeter
Frequency response: 100Hz-40kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power handling: 100W
Dimensions: 106(w) x 160(h) x 142(d)mm Weight: 1.4kg

Centre

Drive units: 2 x 3in paper cone LF driver; 1 x 0.75in titanium WideBand dome tweeter
Frequency response: 100Hz-40kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power handling: 100W
Dimensions: 250(w) x 106(h) x 166(d) mm Weight: 2.3kg

HTS Subwoofer

Drive units: 1 x 8in woofer
Frequency response: 50Hz-200Hz
On board power: 100W
Dimensions: 275(w) x 420(h) x 370(d)mm Weight: 10kg
Connections: Line-level cinch and speaker level inputs

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Canton Movie 125 MX
£400 Approx

Highs: Coherent, immersive sound; decent build quality
Lows: Somewhat fiddly binding posts; subwoofer is a little lightweight

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

Satellites

Drive units: 1 x 3.15in midrange driver; 1 x 0.6in aluminium tweeter
Frequency response: 120Hz-25kHz
Sensitivity: N/A
Power handling: N/A
Dimensions: 90(w) x 115(h) x 100(d)mm
Weight: 0.8kg

Centre

Drive units: 2 x 3.15in midrange drivers; 1 x 0.6in tweeter
Frequency response: 120Hz-25kHz
Sensitivity: N/A
Power handling: N/A
Dimensions: 195(w) x 90(h) x 100(d)mm
Weight: 1.5kg

Subwoofer

Drive units: 1 x 8in woofer
Frequency response: 38Hz-140Hz
On board power: 140W
Dimensions: 240(w) x 425(h) x 420(d)mm
Weight: 11.3kg
Connections: Line-level cinch and speaker-level binding post inputs

3RD



HCC VERDICT

Teufel Columa 100
£300 Approx

Highs: Excellent detail presentation; slender tallboy speakers; superb subwoofer
Lows: Fiddly binding posts; some brightness

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

→ Specifications

Columns

Drive units: 2 x 2.75in midrange drivers; 1 x 0.75in fabric tweeter
Frequency response: 120Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: N/A
Power handling: 100W
Dimensions: 300(w) x 1,089(h) x 100(d)mm
Weight: 4.6kg

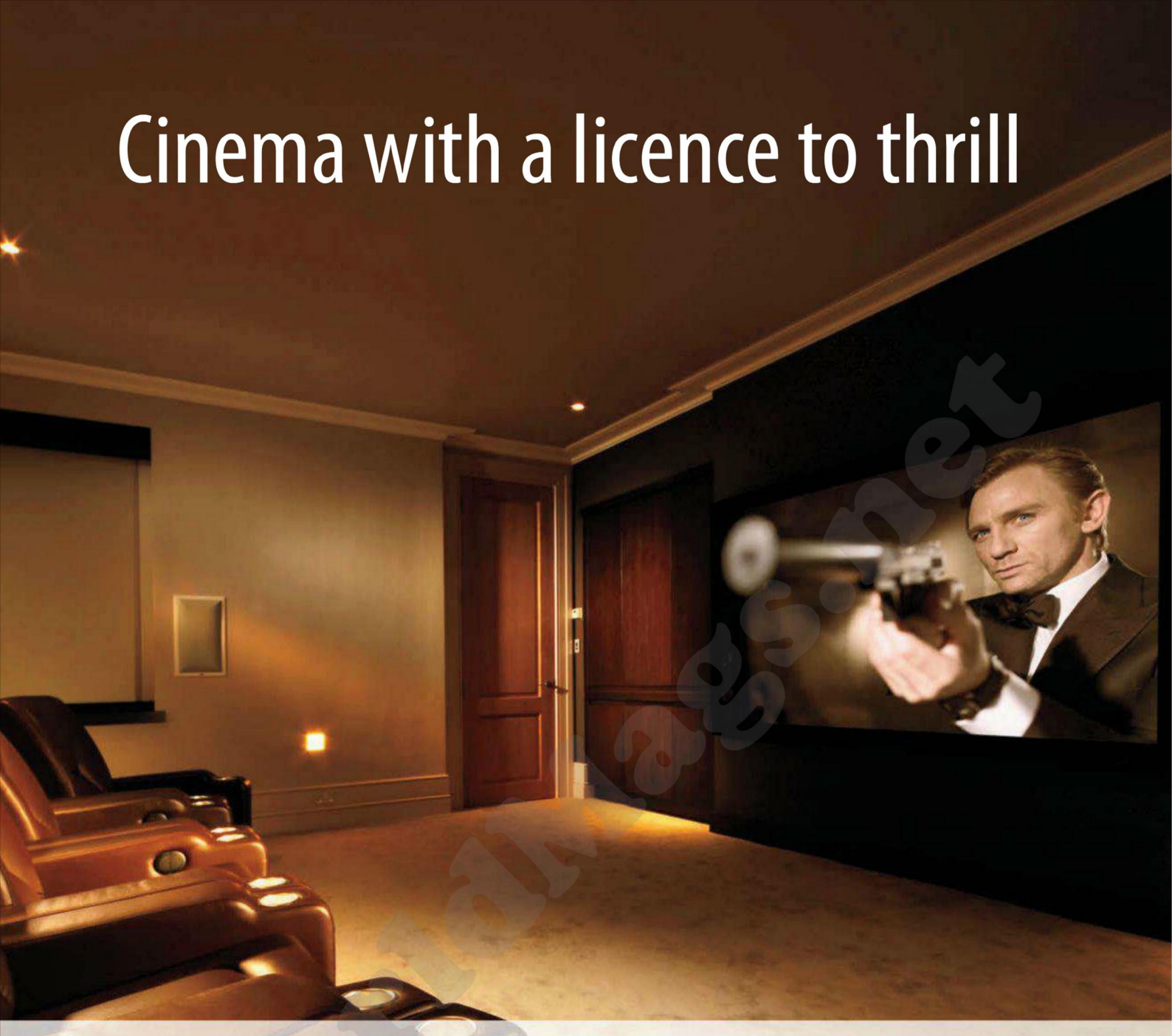
Centre

Drive units: 2 x 2.75in midrange drivers, 1 x 19mm fabric tweeter
Frequency response: 120Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: N/A
Power handling: 100W
Dimensions: 350(w) x 171(h) x 103(d)mm
Weight: 1.5kg

Subwoofer

Drive units: 1 x 8in woofer
Enclosure: Bass reflex
Frequency response: Down to 38Hz
On board power: 100W
Dimensions: 240(w) x 420(h) x 365(d)mm
Weight: 12.8kg
Connections: Line-level cinch input

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Code PE3D4K100A £561.23





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Code AU11CA **£116.49**

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Input signals:

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- NTSC or PAL

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Aavara HDMI cables

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Work in progress

Finishing touches

Adrian Justins trawls the shelves for those must-have home cinema extras

LOEWE SOUNDVISION

Approx £1,250

Premium brand Loewe describes the SoundVision as a 'completely independently functioning sound system'. It's also network-compatible and can be seamlessly integrated into an existing home entertainment network. Essentially, it's a CD player that can also (wirelessly) stream music stored elsewhere in the home, or on some giant server in North Carolina, commonly known as the Cloud.

Available in silver or black finishes, the system exudes quality design and can be operated using the 7.5in touchscreen display or by a conventional remote control. It features six built-in speakers, including two subwoofers, and can play music from a personal library (eg iTunes), CD, iPod, traditional FM radio or the Aupeo! internet radio service.

www.loewe-tv.com

HCC VERDICT

Looks great, but why isn't the control panel portable?

IOMEGA IOMEGA TV WITH BOXEE

From Approx £220

While not blessed with the same looks as Loewe's SoundVision, this more affordable wireless device extends its streaming capabilities to include a broader spectrum of AV content. With 1080p hi-def playback, Iomega TV with Boxee supports most common codecs and file types, including H.264, WMV and MKV. The entry-level model is a streaming-only device, whilst step-up versions with 1TB or 2TB storage retail for £280 and £300 respectively.

Boxee's subs-free tech provides access to thousands of TV shows from the likes of CBS, NBC, Comedy Central, Cartoon Network as well as the Netflix movie library. EMC's LifeLine storage and security technology is also provided, while socially obsessed users can connect to networks including Twitter, Facebook and Google Buzz.

www.iomega.com



HCC VERDICT

A bit ugly on the outside, but slick on the inside



ASUS EEE PAD SLIDER TABLET

Approx £430

The number of tablets on the market is starting to exceed the stock cupboard at Boots, but this innovative slab deserves consideration for anyone who likes to do a lot of typing.

Running on the Android OS, the Slider has a slide-out QWERTY keyboard as well as the touchscreen keypad. Other features include an NVIDIA Tegra 2 dual core processor, Abobe Flash, 10 finger multi-touch support and an array of utilities including ASUS Waveface and Polaris Office 3.

The 10in 16:10 screen claims a 178° viewing angle, making it suitable for two people to watch a movie at once, plus a mini HD output means content can be viewed on a bigscreen TV.

www.asus.com

HCC VERDICT

Beat that, Apple!



ONEFORALL SMART CONTROL MOTION

Approx £35

Ever thought about the time that is wasted when looking for a button on your remote control? Us neither. But using gestures to operate your home cinema clearly has time-saving advantages as well as ensuring you can keep your eyes on the screen. That's where the Smart Control Motion comes in. This handset can command up to six different devices, and the gestures change according to which device is selected. For example, a quick flick to the right and back again skips through the commercials when watching programmes recorded using Freeview+ or Sky+, with no additional programming required. A 'Goodnight' feature means you can turn everything off by flipping the device onto its front. Smart.

www.oneforall.com

HCC VERDICT

Exercise your arms whilst watching telly



HOUSE OF MARLEY JAMMIN'

Approx £30

Bob Marley's children, who run headphone brand House of Marley, are donating a portion of its profits to the 1Love.org charity. Other worthy attributes of these in-ear buds include construction from FSC-certified wood and recycled and recyclable aluminium and plastic, plus eco-friendly packaging.

www.thehouseofmarley.com

HCC VERDICT

Cans with a conscience

Clips...

Small items that will make a big difference to your system

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£150 approx



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www.qed.co.uk

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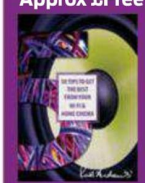
£300 Approx



Weighing under 200g, this pocket-sized camera can record up to 25 minutes of hi-def video or 1,000 stills on one full charge of its battery. It has 2GB built-in memory plus a MicroSD card slot and, uniquely, it can project your handiwork at 800 x 600 resolution up to 65in with a brightness of 20 lumens
www.3MCamcorder Projector.com

Russ Andrews 50 Tips Guide

Approx £Free



Packed with useful ideas for home cinema enthusiasts, Russ Andrews' 50 Tips Guide is available free of charge to download from the company's website. The guide has been published to celebrate 25 years of business for Russ Andrews Accessories.
www.russandrews.com/50tips

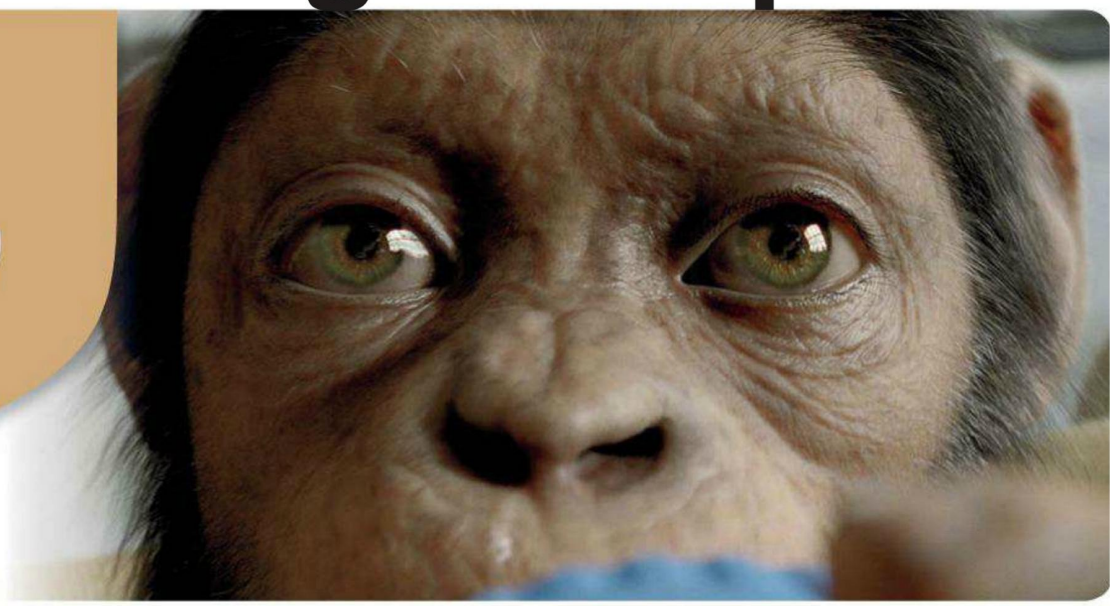
Sanus Elements HDMI cable

From Approx £30

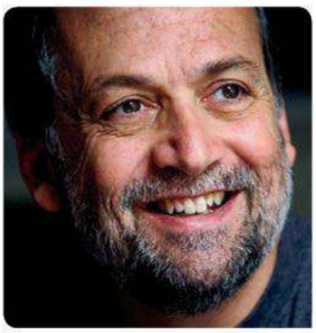


With a metal connector 40 per cent shorter than a standard HDMI connector and an ultra flexible cable, this super slim HDMI interconnect is ideal for situations where a TV is mounted very close to a wall. It's available in 1m, 2m and 3m lengths, priced at £30, £35 and £40 respectively.
www.sanus.com

"The real challenge was the Caesar character, because you have to start with him being a real ape. Right?"



Rise of the Planet of the Apes sets the FX bar higher than ever before. Chris Jenkins finds out how the monkey business was done from Weta Digital's Joe Letteri



Oscar-winner: Letteri won four Academy Awards for his work on the Lord of the Rings, King Kong and Avatar

With its reputation confirmed by its CGI character-creation work on the *Lord of the Rings* movies and *Avatar*, New Zealand facility Weta Digital seemed the ideal choice to create the myriad simians for *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. But how did Joe Letteri, senior visual effects supervisor and a director of the company, tackle the challenge of creating convincing characters?

'We have about 1,000 people at Weta, and we had about 500 working on this film. The real challenge was the Caesar character, because you have to start with him being a real ape. Right? That's the story. But you have to have an ape that can also act as a human does, that would be able to portray emotion. There were a number of things we tried to do – one was the whole idea of performance capture, which was something we did for *Avatar*. But because you have the Na'vi in their own [CG] world, we worked on what we call a 'volume', which is essentially just a sound stage for performance capture. But here we wanted to take it on to all the sets and all the locations, so we shrunk down all the cameras and everything that Andy [Serkis] had to wear, so that he could just work on set with everybody. That way we could record his performance, see his performance on film, and then go in and replace it with Caesar's performance.'

But the problem of creating the look of Caesar was equally challenging: 'Creating him so he looks realistic as a chimp, and so he could do the full range of emotion like Andy has, especially in the eyes. We made his eyes slightly more human than a chimp would be. Partly because he has this enhanced intelligence, but also partly you have to read everything in the eyes because he has no dialogue. That was the key focus for us'.

Of course, *Rise...* presented more of a challenge than the original *...Apes* movies, in which the

evolved chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans were essentially humanoid. They could be portrayed by actors in prosthetics. *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* stops short of showing the revolution, or explaining how the apes evolve into those more humanoid, speaking forms seen in the original series. 'So,' says Letteri, 'we start off in the present day where chimps are chimps. There was no way to do that with actors in suits, the body proportions are different. You could try all kinds of makeup but in a way that actually limits your performance – an actor has to project through all that latex. What we can do (with motion capture) is take the minute detail Andy does, and translate that to Caesar or what you see on the screen'.

But if creating one ape is difficult, how do you go about creating hundreds – then placing them in convincing environments? It probably helps your enjoyment of the movie if you don't ask yourself just how many apes there are likely to be in San Francisco, as Letteri laughingly admits. 'You know... they get around! Okay, how many bullets are there in a gun when you watch a movie?

'For the Golden Gate Bridge scene, we built a 100-metre span of the bridge, and had hundreds of performance capture cameras all over. Then we built a digital Golden Gate bridge, and we would shoot a little piece, take that photography and put it into the digital bridge. *Avatar* was much bigger in scope, but for *...Apes* we had to pay a lot of attention to the contact between the chimps and the humans because that was the real essence of the film.'

But of course, it's the interaction between human and ape which has always given the franchise its appeal. 'Apes are very human and we studied them very closely. Wellington Zoo has a troop of chimps, and we spent a lot of time just watching them feed, and groom, and fight and play and do all the things that apes do. But we didn't use any real apes in the movie – they were all digital. We made them all!'

Chimprovisation

So did the production process involve director Rupert Wyatt racking up plenty of airmiles? 'We talk before, during, and after each scene. There is a lot of talking. It's mostly talking about what we are trying to get, is everything in the right place to do it, does it look quite right, would it be better if we did it this way... then Rupert would come back and say, "okay great we will do it this way", or "I really want something here because I need it for the story later." It's like a big jigsaw puzzle. You are putting all the pieces together right until the very last day. We brought everything up to Vancouver during the shoot, but worked remotely via video conference after'.

So can Letteri imagine a time when digital characters replace actors? 'Technologically anything could be done if a studio wanted to pay for it, but they wouldn't pay for that. You have to have the actor, you have to have them on the set, you have to rehearse them, you have to film them, you have to pay for them, and at that point you wouldn't bother replacing them with something that looks like themselves. I like creating characters that you could never see or do in any other way, but working with actors, because that is where the performance comes from. Then we can create the visual reality of that character married with that performance, and then you get something you have never seen before.'









Aping around: Caesar had to be capable of portraying a wide range of emotions just through his facial expressions

Of course the quality of the acting then becomes paramount, and no-one quite does motion capture like Andy Serkis. 'Andy has this unique ability to inhabit these roles. What he does just works really well for us. Maybe because we have worked with him for so long, we can understand the nuance of what he does. Everything you do that brings a character to the screen is like translating a language in a way – the difference between how much an eye is open or closed can really change an expression. We could look at Andy and look at what he is doing there, but if you put it on Caesar and get it off by a millimetre, then it changes the expression – he goes from looking sleepy to looking alert. You have to make that choice frame by frame. That is what we do as animators.

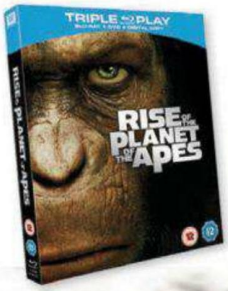
'Andy didn't play the role of Caesar as a baby – that was too small, but we looked at chimp babies to see how they would behave. Andy started from when he was a toddler so he was doing all the sign language and playing with the crayons. That was Andy, he's just a big baby!'

Primate practice

The motion-capture process used to turn an actor's performance into an animated character demands close cooperation between actor and technician, says Letteri. 'The first shot of the movie probably took about six months to do. Just to get the first one right. But by the end of the movie you can do 100 or so a week, and you can get it all down because you know what you are doing.

'We place markers all over the actor's body. The human skeleton is very mechanical; you can say my arm was here, and now it moved this much, and you can look at all the markers and how it just moved. Then you can make the chimps do the same thing. The face, that's a little more complicated. We record every frame on the face, but any time you have an emotion your muscles do certain things in certain combinations, and that creates expressions. Chimps have the same muscles, so we take what we think Andy's muscles are doing and make Caesar's muscles do the same thing. We go back and keep refining until it is right. It's a combination of learning software we've written and manual control, and when it's done you go on to the next shot, and you do that about 1,000 times and you're done!'

With this movie safely in the can, Weta Digital can move on to other projects – and something tells us that the lessons learned on *...Apes* will have come in useful when the small, hairy characters of *The Hobbit* patter onto the screen...



Rise of the Planet of the Apes is available to buy now on DVD and Triple Play Blu-ray, courtesy of 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment

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PLAYBACK

→Software highlights SUPER 8 E.T. fights back in this retro sci-fi blockbuster
CAPTAIN AMERICA Patriotic hero waves the flag for HD CARS 2 3D Pixar aims for 3D pole position
→Opinion FILM FANATIC The trials and tribulations of putting an awards issue together
DOWNLOAD CENTRAL Netflix is coming, but why should you care? AND MORE!



HD hack 'n' slash

Conan the Barbarian → Double Play
Lionsgate → Region B BD/R2 DVD

Robert E Howard's pulp icon makes his 3D Blu-ray debut. Turn to page 105 to find out if the film's added dimensions make up for its lack of Arnold Schwarzenegger...

HCC Ratings key

Barbarians	1 2 3 4 5
Barbarella	1 2 3 4 5
Bar billiards	1 2 3 4 5
Barney Rubble	1 2 3 4 5
Barn dancing	1 2 3 4 5



Army recruits are getting younger every year



Creature feature

This science-fiction throwback serves up cutting-edge surround sound thrills





HCC VERDICT

Super 8: Triple Play
Paramount → All-region
BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx

We say: Super hi-def package for a fun sci-fi throwback

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Super 8

At first glance, JJ Abrams' new sci-fi flick stands out from the rest of this year's blockbusters by virtue of not being a remake or based on an existing property. But looks can be deceiving. While *Super 8* is essentially an original story, it's so heavily indebted to the early films of Steven Spielberg (right down to the pre-credits use of the original Amblin Entertainment logo) that it actually feels like a remake.

Playing out like a more violent version of *E.T.*, Abrams' film takes place in smalltown America, circa 1979, and follows a group of kids who realise that a nearby train crash has unleashed something unearthly in the area. And for the most part *Super 8* really hits the mark. The young cast are excellent, the set-up delivers plenty of thrills and chills, and the evocation of the period is wonderfully believable. It's just a shame that it stumbles somewhat at the end, delivering a rather schmaltzy and far too convenient finale for what had previously been an exciting and affecting piece of blockbuster cinema.

Picture: While its treatment of catalogue titles has been a little hit and miss, Paramount frequently pulls out all of the stops when it comes to AV performance on new releases. And *Super 8* is no exception.

Presented as an AVC 2.40:1 encode, the film's 1080p visuals are nothing less than astonishing. Blacks are rock-solid and exceptionally deep, colours are warm and vivid, and detailing is impeccable throughout. All told, it's a cinematic encode that is undoubtedly a superb representation of the filmmakers' original vision. There is, however, an awful lot of lens flare evident in the film. It's a visual technique that Abrams clearly relishes (see his *Star Trek* for more proof), but may prove distracting for those who favour a pristine HD image.

Audio: For the most part, this Blu-ray's native Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mix is an effective, if not exactly grandstanding affair. Dialogue is pin-sharp and entirely natural, while terrific use is made of ambient effects across the entire soundfield.

And then there's Chapter 3's train crash. One of the most aggressive and powerful audio experiences I've ever had the pleasure to run through my system, this particular sequence is awash with dynamic surround effects as pieces of carriage crash all around you, and room-rumbling bass accompanying each impact and explosion.

Extras: While it doesn't exactly set any new benchmarks for innovation, *Super 8* comes to Blu-ray with an interesting and informative batch of bonus goodies. The commentary by writer/director JJ Abrams, producer Bryan Burk and cinematographer Larry Phong covers a lot of the production details and is supported by eight featurettes. There's also an interactive look at the train crash (featuring script extracts, interviews, pre-viz and much more), 14 deleted scenes, plus a DVD and Digital Copy. ***AvB***

Kill List

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Director Ben Wheatley discovers new ways to unsettle audiences this new superb thriller/horror hybrid. To say anything about the plot would spoil the sick fun the film has in store – suffice to say that this is one movie where it really is best to go in with no knowledge of what's to come. With it's grim visuals, *Kill List* doesn't necessarily scream high-quality hi-def, but the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode does a sturdy job of replicating the visual style. Audio is provided in the form of an ominous and atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Quality extras include two chat-tracks and interviews. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Community: Season 1

Sony Pictures → R2 DVD
£23 Approx



The past few years have seen some terrific new sitcoms making the journey across the Atlantic, and they don't come much funnier than *Community*. It's broadcast on Viva! on UK TV, so this excellent four-disc set will hopefully open the series up to the wider audience it deserves. On DVD each of the 25 episodes benefits from a remarkably robust anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer and lively DD 5.1 mix. Extremely generous extras include episode commentaries, extended episodes, outtakes, gag reels and more. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Zookeeper

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Talking animal movies are nothing new. But surely somebody, somewhere could come up with a more original take on the concept than this laughter-free mash-up of *Night at the Museum* and *Doctor Dolittle*.

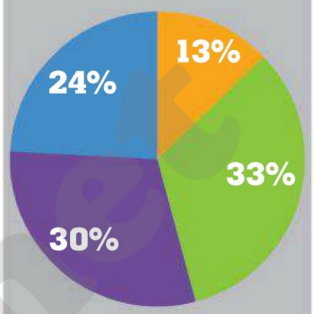
While the film is pretty dreadful, the disc itself holds up fairly well. The AVC 2.40:1 1080p visuals are colourful and razor-sharp, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is suitably atmospheric despite not being asked to do too much. Extras are limited to MovieIQ, eight deleted scenes, nine short featurettes and an unrelated PS3 game demo. ***AvB***

1 **2** 3 4 5

We asked you...

Are you excited by the news that Netflix is coming to the UK and Ireland in 2012?

- Most definitely
- Not at all
- Who cares
- What's a 'Netflix'?



Results of poll from www.homecinemachoice.com

Eat your heart out, Alan Sugar

An enjoyable hi-def package ensures that these bosses aren't so horrible after all



→ Horrible Bosses

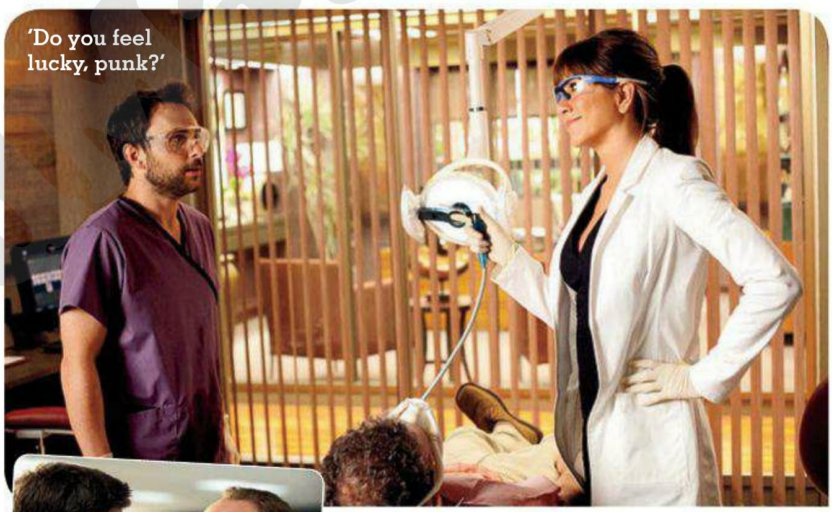
Taking its cue from Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, this likeable comedy stars Jason Bateman, Charlie Day and Jason Sudeikis as three friends who decide to kill each others' horrifically unbearable bosses (Kevin Spacey, Jennifer Aniston and Colin Farrell, respectively).

It's a neat comedic concept that pretty much everyone can get behind and, for the most part, Horrible Bosses is a pleasure to watch. The entire cast are uniformly excellent, although it's Jamie Foxx who gets the biggest laughs as 'murder consultant' Mother****er Jones. Yet the narrative runs out of steam in the final act, and you're left with a sudden ending that suggests the filmmakers had no idea how to get out of the corner they'd painted themselves into.

Picture: This wicked comedy comes to Blu-ray with a splendid AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode that is very well behaved at all times. While black crush occasionally raises its head, it never intrudes too heavily on the film's often shadowy visuals. Meanwhile, the palette displays a richness and warmth that really benefits from the format's native colour space. Film grain is also pleasingly resolved through, giving the movie a very natural look, although there are a couple of darker sequences that veer from native grain to something much more noisy.

Audio: *Horrible Bosses*' DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack follows the usual comedy route of focusing all of its attention on dialogue and music. While this is handled with aplomb, it does shift the balance towards the front of the soundfield, meaning that there's very little going on in the surrounds for most of the film's running time. Technically accurate it may be, but it's not what you'd call exciting. In fact, it's a waste of your rear speakers.

Extras: The most inappropriate thing about this 'Totally Inappropriate Edition' Blu-ray is undoubtedly its meagre selection of bonus features. There's a choice of the original 98-minute theatrical cut and a slightly flabby 106-minute extended version. These are joined by seven deleted scenes, and a trio of lacklustre featurettes where the cast and crew talk about unbearable jobs, their own 'horrible boss' experiences and how to deal with them. The closest we get to any real behind-the-scenes material is a short look at the creation of the film's soundtrack – whoopee! The set also includes a DVD and Digital Copy of the film. ***AvB***



HCC VERDICT

Horrible Bosses: Totally Inappropriate Edition – Triple Play → Warner Home Video
All-region BD/R2 DVD
£25 Approx

We say: Lots of laughs, few extras

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Film Fanatic

Awards issues of magazines are usually a time for celebration. So why does The Beek find the whole thing so damn stressful?



It's possible that some readers may consider awards features in magazines to be fairly easy for the staff to put together. After all, a regular issue requires us to generate entirely fresh editorial content to fill our pages, while an awards special allows us to go back over material that we've already run during the previous year.

Personally speaking, I think that's a little uncharitable. And not simply because the whole *raison d'être* of an awards issue is to celebrate the best products on the market for your benefit. No, the real problem is that Awards issues are so bloody stressful to put together.

You might think that something like this issue's Movie Awards would be a doddle. Perhaps, in your imagination, the *HCC* team just popped down the pub for an afternoon and hammered out all of the winners based on a) how drunk we were getting and b) what bribes we figured the respective studios would be willing to offer in exchange for a nomination. But, while a certain amount of alcohol was consumed as nominations were discussed, that little fantasy couldn't be further from the truth – and I don't just mean the bit about prospective bribes.



First we had to work out exactly what categories would be included. Even this seemingly simple act proved contentious thanks to what shall forever be remembered as 'videogame-gate', where the team was split over whether or not to include a category for videogames, ignoring the fact that more of our readers than ever admit to gaming on their home cinema systems. Common sense eventually prevailed with the inclusion of a single videogame category that remains true to this publication's cinematic roots, but not without a few spilled pints and war wounds along the way.

Things only got even more fractious as the *HCC* team embarked on the job of choosing the nominees and winners. A handful were obvious, but arguments over others led to **ugly scenes of violence rarely witnessed outside of cheesy '80s Italian post-apocalyptic action films**. Arguments about the various merits of *Sucker Punch* and *Tron: Legacy*'s soundtracks went on and on for considerably longer than the combined running time of the two films. And you don't even want to know what we went through choosing the Disc of the Year winner (when we eventually remembered to include one, but that's another story).

But at last it's over, and the finished issue is now in your hands. Which means that we can start arguing about the winners of the *HCC* 2012 Best Buy Awards instead!

Mildred Pierce

HBO → All-region BD → £25 Approx



Todd Haynes' five-part TV adaptation of James M Cain's classic novel is pure class from start to finish. With its lavish production values and all-star cast (including Kate Winslet and Guy Pearce), this miniseries quickly draws you into its heartbreaking story. HBO's two-disc Blu-ray serves up beautifully inviting and filmic AVC 1.78:1 1080p images and evocative DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics. But it's not all good news – due to the decision to release the BD in the UK a month ahead of the US, extra features weren't available in time to make it onto this release. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

Smallville: The Final Season

Warner Home Video → All-region BD → £50 Approx



And so it ends. Or should that be, begins? The story of Superman's formative years draws to a close with Clark Kent finally donning the iconic suit (albeit only in long-shot in the series finale), and on the way there it recaptures some of the magic that the past few seasons had been so obviously lacking. *Smallville* also sounds pretty super this time, thanks to Warner finally featuring DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes on its TV boxsets. The AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes are generally fine (despite minor artefacting in places) and extras include a couple of commentaries. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Torchwood: Miracle Day

2entertain Ltd. → All-region BD → £30 Approx



The BBC's 'adults-only' *Doctor Who* spin-off has always struggled to find its feet, but everything finally clicked into place with the wonderful 2009 miniseries *Children of Earth*. Incredibly, this ten-part US co-production manages to undo all of the good will *Children...* generated. Despite an intriguing setup, the show meanders aimlessly with no purpose before serving up a desperately dull climax. For what it's worth, this four-disc BD set includes tidy AVC 1.78:1 1080i encodes, dynamic DTS-HD HR 5.1 audio and extras that are as uneventful as the show itself. ***MC***

1 **2** 3 4 5

Tales from the Darkside: Season 1

Revelation Films → R2 DVD → £20 Approx



The 1980s were a boom time for horror anthology shows on US TV, including this effort from genre legend George A Romero. Like its contemporaries, the show serves up a mix of new and adapted shorts, but despite Romero's presence as producer (and co-writer of the pilot episode) the show hasn't stood the test of time particularly well – it offers few shocks and seems surprisingly twee at times. All 24 episodes provide somewhat hazy 1.33:1 transfers and predictably flat mono audio, while the sole extra is Romero's intermittent chat-track on the pilot. ***AvB***

1 **2** 3 4 5



Peter Fonda never had to deal with anything quite like this back in 1969

The old red, white and Blu

Marvel's most patriotic superhero delivers the goods in this big-budget blockbuster

→ Captain America: The First Avenger

The final part of the foundations for next summer's *The Avengers* movie are set with the arrival of *Captain America*. Directed by journeyman filmmaker Joe Johnson, the film is a surprising treat, mixing gung-ho WWII action with plenty of superheroic spectacle. Chris Evans does excellent work in the lead, and Hugo Weaving proves an enjoyable foil as the diabolical Red Skull.

Picture: While *Captain America* isn't necessarily the best-looking superhero flick to hit Blu-ray, that's down to the intentional look of the film rather than any technical deficiencies with the 1080p encode itself.

The filmmakers have conjured up a rather subdued aesthetic style, in an effort to lend the film some period authenticity. As such, colours tend to be rather muted (often favouring a sepia tone) and fine detailing (while definitely present) isn't as pronounced as you might expect from a modern blockbuster.

But none of this should really be taken as a criticism. The disc's AVC 2.40:1 encode is technically perfect, with no obvious digital issues such as artefacting, edge enhancement or sharpening.

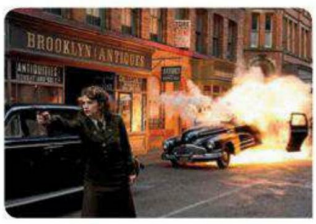


Audio: While some might be a little disappointed by the film's visual performance, nobody could ever say the same about this Blu-ray's audio.

Captain America explodes into action with a thrilling DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack that catapults you into the heart of the action. Whether it's a chase through the streets of Brooklyn or a battle with the Red Skull's special forces, the audio mix will continually surprise with its dynamic use of the full speaker setup and utterly convincing steering. Given all of this, it's hardly surprising that the mix also packs a hefty punch when it comes to the LFE effects, accompanying all of the onscreen action with some truly vigorous bass.

Extras: If the disc falters anywhere, its with the bonus features. They're no bad *per se*, just not as 'super' as you might expect for a film of this ilk.

The director, director of photography and editor kick things off with an extremely technical commentary, which feels a little dry at times. Following this is the second of the *Marvel One-Shot* shorts featuring SHIELD Agent Phil Coulson; four deleted scenes (three with optional commentary); six behind-the-scenes featurettes (running a meagre 46 minutes in total); and a brace of trailers (including an early promo spot Joss Whedon's *The Avengers*). ***AvB***





HCC VERDICT

Captain America: The First Avenger – Triple Play
Paramount → All-region BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx

We say: Marvel Studios delivers another heroic Blu-ray release

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

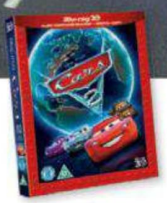
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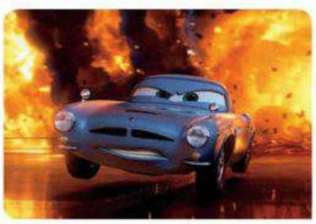


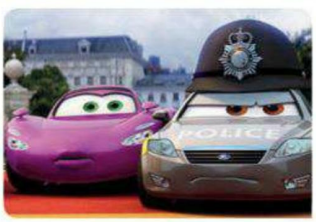
This is what happens if you don't pay the Congestion Charge

Driven to distraction

Formula Four storytelling benefits on Blu-ray from Formula One 3D performance







HCC VERDICT

Cars 2 3D → Walt Disney
All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: This mediocre sequel sets a new standard for 3D animation on Blu-ray

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Cars 2

It had to happen eventually. Pixar has finally made a film that's left me cold. While I didn't find the first *Cars* even half as bad as I'd been led to believe, this sequel's mix of spy action and fish-out-of-water antics seems to have been created to appeal solely to kids and sell them more merchandise along the way ("Now with missile-firing action!"). Still, I'm sure the target audience will absolutely lap it up.

Picture: Given its track record, it comes as no surprise that Pixar's latest look absolutely stunning in hi-def. The AVC 2.40:1 1080p imagery on offer here is sensational. Colours ping from the screen, detailing is incredible and technically the entire thing is pristine.

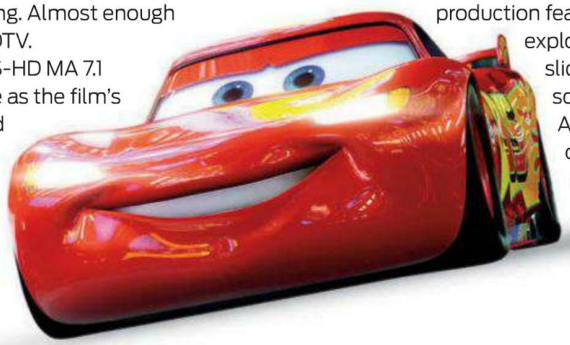
But even that doesn't prepare you for the 3D disc's MVC 2.40:1 1080p encode. Bright, vibrant and completely stable, it flies in the face of everything you've been led to believe about 3D at home. The depth and dimensionality it delivers mindblowing. Almost enough to make you buy a 3DTV.

Audio: The film's DTS-HD MA 7.1 audio is as impressive as the film's visuals. The races and action scenes allow the filmmakers to let loose with dynamic surround effects, and those revving engines ensure that rumbling LFE is never far away. It might be a kids' film, but this soundtrack demands to be played loud.

Extras: While the standard 2D Blu-ray release offers up very little in the way of extras, this multi-disc 3D BD set is packed with them.

The 2D platter is accompanied by an audio commentary from directors John Lasseter and Brad Lewis, plus two animated shorts – *Hawaiian Vacation* (the first of several planned *Toy Story* shorts) and the *Mater's Tall Tales: Air Mater*. The later short is repeated as the sole extra on the 3D platter, although there – like the film it supports – it is presented in 3D.

Which leads us to the bonus Blu-ray available exclusively as part of this 3D set. First up is *The Nuts and Bolts of Cars Land*, a look at the making of Disney's upcoming theme park attraction. The rest of the disc is taken up with an interactive globe, allowing you to access sub-menus based around locations featured in the film. In these you'll find additional short animations, trailers, production featurettes, 3D set explorations, art slideshows, deleted scenes and much more. And make sure you check out every part of the globe itself, as there are also several Easter Eggs waiting to be discovered. ***AvB***



Freedom: Collector's Edition

Manga Entertainment → Region B
BD/R2 DVD → £30 Approx



Born out of a promotion for Nissin Cup Noodles in Japan, this anime sci-fi series is better than you'd expect (although it's not such a shock when you consider that Katsuhiro '*Akira*' Otomo worked on it). While *Freedom* doesn't quite stand up to Otomo's anime classics, it's an interesting story that looks stunning in HD thanks to the beautifully rendered AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes. DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio (Japanese or English) matches the picture quality. Extras include interviews with the production team and CG vehicle footage. ***MC***

1 2 **3** 4 5

Redline

Manga Entertainment → Region B
BD → £20 Approx



Best summed up as the anime answer to *Wacky Races*, *Redline* is one of the most brilliantly bonkers anime titles to arrive in the UK in years. Packed with action from start to finish, and loaded with memorable characters, it's a treat for anime fans. Thankfully, Manga's UK BD release is just as thrilling. The AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode is as tasty as a bottle of Asahi and threatens to dissolve your eyeballs with its vibrant colour palette, while the Dolby TrueHD 5.1 audio places your right at the centre of the onscreen action. Extras take the form of two informative production docs and a trailer. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Peter Gabriel: New Blood 3D

Eagle Vision → All-Region BD
£25 Approx



In March 2011, the ex-Genesis singer teamed up with a full orchestra to run through a selection of his tunes, and filmed it in hi-def 3D. I kinda wish he hadn't bothered, as the result is a sombre, self-indulgent affair that requires you to wear silly glasses. Still, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is crisp and captures the ambience well, and the image is finely detailed, if a little hit 'n' miss as it flits between different cameras and positions. A 20-minute *Making of...* is the only extra (unless you count the 2D BD and DVD platters). One for Gabriel/3D completists only. ***MC***

1 2 **3** 4 5

Slash: Live – Made in Stoke

Eagle Rock → Region BD
£20 Approx



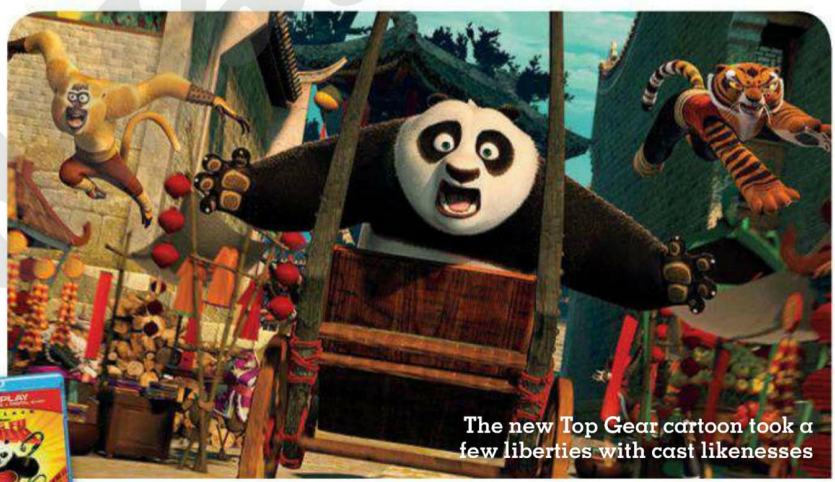
The top-hatted US guitar genius spent his formative years in Stoke, hence this outing on his recent solo tour. The setlist mixes classic tracks from Guns 'n' Roses with Slash's newer material, and will leave fans satiated. This BD offers a bright, colourful 1080i 1.78:1 image unhindered by noise, and three audio tracks – LPCM stereo, DD 5.1 and a lossless DTS-HD Master Audio mix. The sound on each is smooth and polished, but the DTS iteration sounds a tad clearer. Extras are interviews – including Slash's Uncle Ian – and are worth checking out. ***MC***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Everybody was kung fu fighting...

...those cats were fast as lightning. And so were the monkeys, the snakes and the pandas

→ Kung Fu Panda 2



The new Top Gear cartoon took a few liberties with cast likenesses



While it doesn't match the brilliance of the original, this second animated outing for Po and the Furious Five is a worthy sequel that stands up there with the best of DreamWorks' 'toon output.

This time around the plot heads in two (ultimately connected) directions. The first sees our black and white hero Po called upon to defend China from the villainous Lord Shen (Gary Oldman), while the second concerns Po's search for the truth about his parents.

Picture: *Kung Fu Panda* was one of the best-looking Blu-ray releases around when it turned up back in 2008. And, while we've become much more accustomed to what we should expect from HD CG animation over the intervening years, *Kung Fu Panda 2*'s Blu-ray still manages to dazzle.

Framed at approximately 2.35:1, the AVC 1080p encode is hard to fault. The nature of the main character means that it constantly impresses with its perfect rendering of each and every hair on Po's body, while the vibrant colour design gives the image a sense of depth few genuinely 3D presentations can match.

Audio: *Kung Fu Panda 2*'s sonic performance is easily on a par with the disc's HD visuals. The film serves up a procession of fantastic action scenes, and the disc's Dolby TrueHD 7.1 soundtrack brings them to life in style. Whether it's the escape from the collapsing tower in Chapter 8, Po's flashback in Chapter 11 or the final showdown with Lord Shen and his fleet in Chapters 12-14, the mix never fails to creative an involving soundfield full of bold positional effects and big booming bass.

Extras: DreamWorks' animated treat comes to Blu-ray with a handful of exclusive goodies. These take the form of *Animation Inspiration* (an interactive map of China that links to nine short videos highlighting locations that inspired the artists and filmmakers), *The Animators' Corner* (picture-in-picture animatics, interviews and concept art) and a trivia track.

The remaining features are all shared with the DVD release (although all video material is presented in HD here) and take the form of three deleted scenes, a filmmakers' commentary, a couple of set-top games, an educational tool that teaches a selection of Mandarin words and phrases, a featurette about the voice cast and another about Giant Panda conservation. Being a Triple Play package, the set also includes a DVD and Digital Copy of the film. ***AvB***



HCC VERDICT

Kung Fu Panda 2 – Triple Play
Paramount → All-region BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx

We say: Reference-quality AV makes this a must-buy disc

Picture: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Movie: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Download Central

Chris Jenkins views the prospect of VOD streaming service Netflix coming to the UK with a mixture of glee and confusion



It's been a long time coming, but Netflix has finally announced a launch in Europe. Why is this important? Because Netflix has changed the way Americans watch movies and TVs, and it will do the same here.

Founded in 1997 in California, Netflix started off in the mail-based DVD rental business, but by 1999 had launched subscription-based digital distribution. By 2009 it had 10 million subscribers, and it now has over 20 million subscribers, with eyes on the Latin America, South American and European markets.

Why has Netflix been so successful? Because people are lazy, and even the effort of returning a DVD in the post is too much when you can just press a few buttons on a TV or STB remote to view a movie. The selection of titles is increasing constantly, with Paramount, Sony, Disney, Anchor Bay, MGM, Lionsgate and Warner signed up to provide movie and TV content, and Netflix is now moving into TV production itself, part-funding productions so it can get first-run rights.

Netflix is now almost ubiquitous in the US; **whatever computer platform, mobile device or AV equipment you use, it's likely you can access Netflix on it** (if you've very clever, and know how to disguise your IP address, it's even possible to sign up for it outside the US).



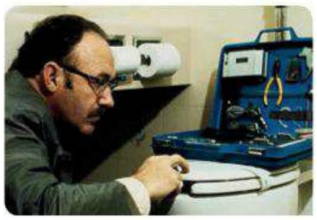
US PS3 owners get Netflix, rather than LOVEFiLM

However, Netflix has recently had a hard time in the market after changing its charge structure, and is also talking about separating out its DVD and games rental businesses, which some commentators suggest means they may be sold off or shut down. Certainly it hasn't suggested going into DVD rental for Europe.

So the expansion into Europe, starting with the UK and Ireland in early 2012, makes sense, though Netflix will face heavy competition from LOVEFiLM and others. The question is whether it can provide the same wide choice of content as it does in the US. If it can, with traditional DVD rental on its last legs, it won't be long before the weekly trip to Blockbuster will be replaced by a browse on your Netflix app in the comfort of your living-room.

The Conversation: Collector's Edition

StudioCanal → Region B BD → £20 Approx



First things first – this is not a direct port of Lionsgate's recent US Blu-ray release of Francis Ford Coppola's paranoid classic. While both versions are similarly specified, the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode on this version is brighter, possibly due to contrast boosting. While it's not particularly damaging to the image, it does ultimately boil down to a question of taste over which you prefer. Also, the original mono mix is presented in an LPCM form here, rather than DTS-HD MA. Otherwise it's the same DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix and multitude of wonderful extras on both. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

The Outsiders: The Complete Novel

StudioCanal → Region B BD → £20 Approx



Coppola's 1983 adaptation of SE Hinton's novel is a veritable parade of Hollywood up-and-comers, including Patrick Swayze, C Thomas Howell, Ralph Macchio, Tom Cruise, Matt Dillon, Rob Lowe, Diane Lane and Emilio Estevez. Fans of the film will be delighted by this Blu-ray's restored AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode and DTS-HD MA 5.1/LPCM 2.0 audio, as well as the copious extras on offer. Sadly, the disc only includes Coppola's 2005 re-edit, which benefits from additional scenes but ditches the majority of Carmine Coppola's original score in favour of rock 'n' roll tracks. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

Brazil

20th Century Fox → All-region BD → £18 Approx



Terry Gilliam's Orwellian sci-fi tale has rarely received the respect it deserves outside of Criterion's 1999 multi-disc R1 DVD release. Unfortunately, this new UK Blu-ray does nothing to redress the situation. The one clear point in its favour is that (unlike Universal's US release) it does at least include the 143-minute Director's Cut, and a reasonable AVC 1.85:1 1080p presentation of it at that. Sadly, that's where the good news ends. The only audio is a bog-standard DD2.0 mix, and extras are limited to a trailer and the archival *What is Brazil?* doc. ***MC***

1 2 **3** 4 5

The Three Colours Trilogy

Artificial Eye → All-region BD → £45 Approx



A must for any serious world cinema fan, this boxset brings the late Krzysztof Kieslowski's hugely influential and acclaimed *Blue*, *White* and *Red* movies to Blu-ray. Each film has a distinctive look and all three are handsomely rendered in HD thanks to the set's naturalistic AVC 1.85:1 1080p encodes. Audio comes in a choice of LPCM 2.0 and DTS-HD MA 5.0 for each, but as these are dialogue-driven films don't expect too much. Extras are mainly interview-based, including 'Kieslowki Masterclasses' and chats with actresses Juliette Binoche and Julie 'Deply' [sic]. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5



Now that's what we call overkill



Barbaric blockbuster

Does the only depth in this adaptation stem from its 3D conversion?

→ Conan the Barbarian

As much as I enjoy Arnie's 1982 take on Conan, I'd be hard pushed to describe it as anything like a faithful screen adaptation of Robert E Howard's pulp icon. Which is why I was quite excited by the idea of somebody trying to reboot the franchise.

But any hopes that this latest version will finally bring the 'real' Conan to the bigscreen are soon dashed. While the cast acquit themselves well, the narrative itself is a tiresome and predictable romp through every fantasy genre cliché you could think of. Epic in scope, but decidedly small in ambition, it's a real missed opportunity.

Picture: This latest cinematic take on the bigscreen barbarian flexes some impressive AV muscle on Blu-ray. Viewed in its 2D form, the film's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is a snorter. While colours tend to be fairly muted for the most part (although the frequent splashes of blood are vividly saturated), the rest of this hi-def presentation simply scream for attention. Edges are as sharp as Conan's sword and the quality of the fine detailing and textures evident throughout the film continually impresses.

But that's only part of the story. Throw the disc into a 3D-capable home cinema system and you can opt to watch the film stereoscopically (as with Lionsgate's previous 3D discs, the option to watch in 3D only appears when the disc is inserted into a compatible system). Sadly, *Conan the Barbarian* wasn't shot in native 3D, but was converted in post-production, a fact that is evident from the generally uneventful nature of the stereoscopic presentation. Technical issues like crosstalk are few and far between, instead the real problem is how flat and dull the 3D experience. There's very little convincing dimensionality found in any shot, and the added depth feels layered rather than wholly natural.

Audio: While the film's 3D visuals aren't exactly convincing, the same cannot be said of this enveloping DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack. Filled to the brim with directional effects and subwoofer-bothering bass, it's the kind of track that makes up for its lack of acoustic subtlety with raw power. Remarkably, despite all of the brute force in evidence, there's also an impressive clarity, with everything from vocal performances to the sharp ring of clashing steel coming through sweetly.

Extras: The special features get underway with a disappointing chat-track from director Marcus Nispel. It proves most notable for the number of long silences it contains. A second, much more chatty track is provides by stars Jason Momoa and Rose McGowan. Perhaps combining the two commentaries would have been the better option in this instance? The remaining extras take the form of four all-too-short featurettes looking at *Conan the Barbarian*'s legacy, the life of Robert E Howard, shooting the film's action scenes and pre-viz/rehearsal footage. The set also includes the trailer and a bonus DVD copy of the film. ***AvB***



HCC VERDICT

Conan the Barbarian: Double Play → Lionsgate → Region B BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx

We say: This fantasy flick is surprisingly one-dimensional for a 3D Blu-ray release

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Extras: 1 **2** 3 4 5
Movie: 1 **2** 3 4 5

Overall: 1 **2** 3 4 5



Workprint

The Human Centipede 2

Eureka! → Region B BD
£20 Approx



Tom Six's original *Human Centipede* was a solitary horror gag spun out into an entire movie. With the shock of the new now absent, this 'Meta' sequel simply opts for upping the gross-out quotient as it follows a disturbed parking attendant and fan of the original film who sets about making his own (even longer) human centipede. It's unremittingly horrible stuff, even in this BBFC-censored version (shorn of a couple of minutes), but to be fair to Eureka, the disc's AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode and DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio are both technically sound. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Straw Dogs: Ultimate Edition

Fremantle → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Timed to coincide with the UK cinema release of the new remake, this '40th Anniversary Ultimate Edition' Blu-ray is a major letdown for fans of Peckinpah's controversial classic. While it's absolutely loaded with extras (which can't be said for MGM's recent US release), the AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode is extremely problematic. Contrast is completely blown out, detailing is hit and miss at best, and in the final few scenes the native grain is replaced by swirling clouds of digital noise. At least the LPCM 2.0 audio is comparatively problem-free. ***MC***

1 2 3 4 5

The Exterminator

Arrow Video → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Taking a break from its usual serving of Italian Giallo and '80s US horror, *The Exterminator* finds Arrow Video indulging in a spot of vigilante justice-style exploitation. This enjoyably gory *Death Wish*-wannabe stars Robert Ginty as a Vietnam veteran out for revenge on the gang that crippled his friend. It's complete low-budget tosh, but so OTT in its violence that it's hard not to enjoy. While this type of flick will never set new standards for BD, the AVC 1.85:1 1080p video and DTS 2.0 mix hold up rather well. Extras include a lively chat-track with the producer. ***MC***

1 2 3 4 5

Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale

Icon → Region B BD
£15 Approx



Having opening to great reviews at cinemas last December, this festive Norwegian chiller has finally come home. But what a disappointment it is. Not the film, which is a deliciously wicked little tale, but rather Icon's Blu-ray package. The recent US disc was loaded with extras and boasted top-notch AV credentials, while this UK offering is barebones (bar DTS Sound Check tests) and features an AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode that suffers from artefacting and edge-enhancement. At least the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio still kicks festive ass. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

Back to the futur(ama)

The fan-favourite animated sci-fi sitcom is back from the dead. Again

→ Futurama: Season 5



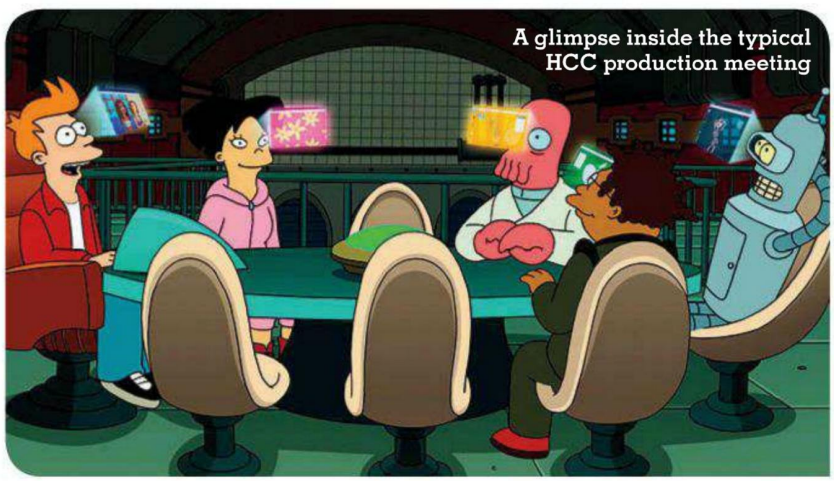
Good news everyone. *Futurama* has been brought back from cancellation for a second time – it's starting to seem like nothing short of the end of the world will keep Matt Groening's sci-fi off our screens. Which is no bad thing as (no matter how niche its fanbase might be) *Futurama* remains the most consistently funny and geek-friendly 'toon around.

This latest batch of 13 episodes is no exception. From the dangers of robosexuality to the terrifying truth about cats, no comedy concept is left unexplored. And amongst all of the laughs, the show also continues to be one clever and even touching. Welcome back *Futurama*, you've been sorely missed.

Picture: This was the first full season of *Futurama* to air in hi-def in the US, something that comes through loud and clear thanks to this Blu-ray's gorgeous AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes. Every episode looks sharp, clean and colourful – just like you'd expect. The HD presentation also makes the most of the show's 3D-rendered spacecraft.

Just as importantly, there are no obvious technical issues with the imagery. Even the usual culprits when it comes to animation on Blu-ray – artefacting and banding – are absent here.

Audio: If this Blu-ray audio isn't quite as dramatic as the imagery, then that's simply because it has less to work with. As an animation *Futurama* has always been fairly playful when it comes to sound design. But despite this, the show's TV origin means that no matter how creative it gets, it never really compares to a cinematic release.



A glimpse inside the typical HCC production meeting



HCC VERDICT

Futurama: The Complete Season 5 → 20th Century Fox
Region A/B BD → £25 Approx

We say: Sci-fi toon gets top-notch presentation on BD

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

That said, the sound designers here certainly take plenty of care in the work they do. The voice performances are cleanly rendered, the music packs plenty of tonal range and, when it comes to the crunch (such as the end of the world in *The Late Phillip J Fry*) the show can offer up some remarkably accomplished spatial effects.

Extras: As with every previous *Futurama* release, this latest two-disc set is packed with goodies to keep fans going after the episodes themselves come to a close.

Each of the 13 episodes gets a commentary track featuring various members of the cast and crew, and which always manage to raise a chuckle. Also on offer are 22 deleted scenes, *The Adventures of a Delivery Boy* video comic (drawn and narrated by Phillip J Fry), a live table read accompanied by animatic storyboards, an insane Bender music video and more. ***AvB***

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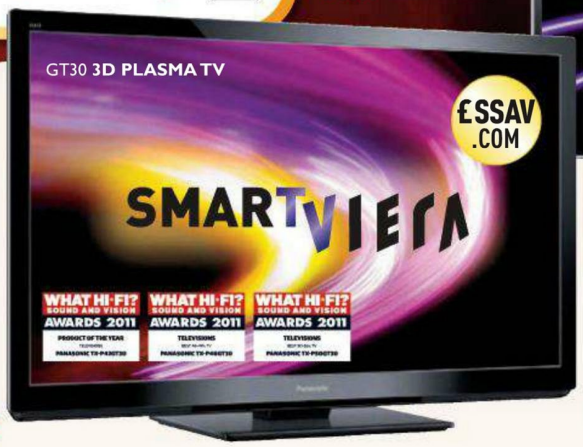
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HCC Ratings key

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TV screens



	Manufacturer	Model	Price	Size (inches)	3D type	Panel type	HDMI	Component	PC	Networking	Internet TV	Wi-fi ready	Freeview HD	Freesat HD	Issue	Rating	Comment
	LG	50PZ950T	£1,600	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	196	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent all rounder, minor judder
	LG	47LW550T	£1,200	47	P	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Web browser is multimedia icing
	LG	50PX990	£1,600	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	192	1 2 3 4 5	Adds 3D to the 50PK990
	LG	42LV450U	£530	42	–	LED	3	1	1	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	200	1 2 3 4 5	Lacks Freeview HD and net features
NEW ENTRY	LG	55LW980T	£2,500	55	P	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	202	1 2 3 4 5	Rear LED, passive TV is superb
NEW ENTRY	Loewe	Individual Compose 3D	£5,000	46	A	LED	3	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	202	1 2 3 4 5	Debut 3D screen offers motorised control and built-in HDD
	Loewe	Individual 40	£5,500	40	–	LED	3	1	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	192	1 2 3 4 5	Exquisite design and performance
	Panasonic	TX-P55VT30	£2,700	55	A	PDP	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	197	1 2 3 4 5	Sublime plasma is best-in-class
	Panasonic	TX-L37DT30	£950	37	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	196	1 2 3 4 5	Do-it-all 3D capable thin screen
	Panasonic	TX-L42E3B	£600	42	–	LED	3	1	1	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	200	1 2 3 4 5	No frills 42in LED seems expensive
	Panasonic	TX-P50GT30	£1,800	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	195	1 2 3 4 5	Stunning 2D and 3D mid-ranger
	Panasonic	TX-P42ST30	£1,200	42	A	PDP	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	198	1 2 3 4 5	Entry-level 3D plasma
	Philips	40PFL8605	£1,300	40	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	192	1 2 3 4 5	Accomplished 2D pics. Poor X-talk
	Philips	Cinema 21:9	£4,000	58	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	190	1 2 3 4 5	Faultless movie viewing
	Samsung	UE40D6530	£1,100	40	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	198	1 2 3 4 5	Brilliant pictures and Smart skills
	Samsung	UE40D7000	£1,400	40	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	197	1 2 3 4 5	Gorgeous TV, superb performance
	Samsung	UE55D8000	£2,500	55	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	196	1 2 3 4 5	Minor 3D X-talk, otherwise stunning
	Samsung	UE60D8000	£4,300	60	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	200	1 2 3 4 5	Big screen comes with a big price
	Samsung	UE46C8000	£1,700	46	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	192	1 2 3 4 5	Black levels fail to spoil super pics
	Samsung	UE40D5520	£600	40	–	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	200	1 2 3 4 5	Superb budget set is hard to fault
	Samsung	PS50C6900	£1,300	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	191	1 2 3 4 5	Great value for money, decent pics
	Samsung	PS51D6900	£1,000	51	A	PDP	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	198	1 2 3 4 5	Aggressively priced 3D bigscreen
	Sharp	LC-37LE320	£700	37	–	LED	3	1	1	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Tasty set suited to a second room
	Sharp	LC-46LE831E	£1,300	46	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	199	1 2 3 4 5	Sharp's best LED screen ever
	Sony	KDL-40CX523	£550	40	–	CCFL	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	200	1 2 3 4 5	CCFL screen packs tons of features
	Sony	KDL-40HX723	£1,300	40	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	201	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent bigscreen all-rounder
	Sony	KDL-40EX524	£800	40	–	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	197	1 2 3 4 5	Great features, decent 2D-only pics
	Sony	KDL-40NX713	£1,000	40	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	193	1 2 3 4 5	Needs optional transmitter for 3D
	Toshiba	42RL853	£600	42	–	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	199	1 2 3 4 5	Affordable 42incher with few frills
	Toshiba	42HL833	£500	42	–	LED	2	1	1	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	200	1 2 3 4 5	Good HD pics but only two HDMIs
	Toshiba	47VL863	£900	47	P	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	201	1 2 3 4 5	Suffers from limited contrast
	Toshiba	46VL758	£1,500	46	–	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕	⊖	192	1 2 3 4 5	Undone by inconsistent backlight
	Toshiba	55WL768	£1,850	55	A	LED	4	1	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	191	1 2 3 4 5	HD good, 3D bad. Basic online stuff

A= Active. P= Passive

TV SCREENS EXPLAINED...

PLASMA VS LCD. PLUS, 3D'S RIVAL SYSTEMS

The TV market is becoming increasingly dominated by LED-lit LCD screens that are much thinner than traditional cold cathode fluorescent lamp (CCFL) screens. For 42in and above, plasma display panels (PDPs) come into play. These generally offer superior black levels, better viewing angles and less 3D cross-talk, but less brightness.

Most 3D screens feature the Active system that uses expensive powered 3D specs to deliver full HD images to each eye. Passive 3D TVs have a filter over the screen and use non-powered specs with polarising filters. The glasses are cheap as chips, but the resolution of 3D is halved to 540 lines.

Editor's Choice...



SAMSUNG

55in → UE55D8000 → £2,500 Approx

Samsung's cost-no-object 9000 series launched in 2010 but still tops the brand's range – however, if you want Samsung's most technologically advanced screen then look no further than its 2011 8000 series. Stunning looks with pics to match.

Tested: Issue 196
For more info visit: www.samsung.co.uk

Blu-ray players



Manufacturer	Model	Price	BD Live storage	3D	Multi-channel analogue out	HDMI	USB	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	DVD-Audio/SACD	Issue	Rating	Comment
Arcam	FMJ-BDP100	£1,000	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Rock-solid build quality and pics to match
Cambridge Audio	Azur 650BD	£400	⊕	⊖	⊕	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊕/⊕	184	1 2 3 4 5	Top-notch build pays dividends with 2D fodder
Cambridge Audio	Azur 751BD	£800	⊕	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕/⊕	199	1 2 3 4 5	Universal deck performs well, needs more 'net
Denon	DBP-1611UD	£400	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕/⊕	194	1 2 3 4 5	Awful GUI but 3D pics are as good as it gets
Denon	DBP-2012UD	£750	⊕	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕/⊕	198	1 2 3 4 5	High-performance player with battleship build
Denon	Cara	£2,000	⊖	⊖	⊖	4	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	185	1 2 3 4 5	With built-in 5 x 75W digital amp
Dune	Smart B1	£240	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	198	1 2 3 4 5	Advanced networking features will wow techies
LG	BX580	£150	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	189	1 2 3 4 5	Reasonable BD pics, messy DVD upscaler
LG	BD570	£200	⊖	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	186	1 2 3 4 5	Speedy loading and highly multi-media capable
LG	BD670	£170	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	199	1 2 3 4 5	Smart BD player offers great value
Marantz	UD7006	£800	⊕	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕/⊕	200	1 2 3 4 5	Superior AV performance and tasty design
NAD	M56	£1,900	⊖	⊖	⊕	1	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖/⊖	183	1 2 3 4 5	Motion processing issues spoil the day
Onkyo	BD-SP808	£500	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	195	1 2 3 4 5	Accomplished disc spinner. Slow disc loader
Oppo	BDP-95EU	£900	⊕	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕/⊕	197	1 2 3 4 5	Even better build and results than the BDP-93EU
Oppo	BDP-93EU	£500	⊕	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕/⊕	195	1 2 3 4 5	Awesomely good video and music performance
Oppo	BDP-83SE	£1,300	⊖	⊖	⊕	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊕/⊕	190	1 2 3 4 5	Precision engineered analogue audio output
Panasonic	DMP-BD75	£110	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	196	1 2 3 4 5	OK images, quick loader, underwhelming to use
Panasonic	DMP-BDT310	£260	⊖	⊕	⊖	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Terrific new GUI, refined sound and pictures
Panasonic	DMP-BDT300	£260	⊖	⊕	⊕	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Versatile, aging deck. Look out for discounts
Panasonic	BFT800EBK	£650	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	192	1 2 3 4 5	Built-in soundbar and iPod dock. Great 3D pics
Philips	BDP7600	£200	⊖	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	198	1 2 3 4 5	Feature-heavy deck with open web browser
Philips	BDP7500 MKII	£200	⊕	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Slickly designed with decent 2D and 3D images
Pioneer	BDP-LX53	£400	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	187	1 2 3 4 5	Basic and slow to load but impressive BD pics
Samsung	BD-D7500	£250	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	198	1 2 3 4 5	Style-centric wall-mountable 3D player
Samsung	BD-D6900	£300	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖/⊖	195	1 2 3 4 5	Decent BD deck with built-in Freeview HD tuner
Samsung	BD-C6900	£255	⊕	⊕	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Quick loader, versatile deck. Passable pictures
Sharp	BD-HP90S	£290	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Slot-loading vertical design, expensive
Sony	BDP-S380	£130	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊕	199	1 2 3 4 5	Budget player misses out on 3D and networking
Sony	BDP-S480	£150	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊕	198	1 2 3 4 5	Brilliant deck offers superior VOD at a low price
Sony	BDP-S570	£160	⊕	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖/⊕	185	1 2 3 4 5	Supreme quality deck; plenty of web content
Sony	BDP-SX1	£300	⊖	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	202	1 2 3 4 5	Portable, WSVGA resolution, but outputs Full HD
Toshiba	BDX3100	£185	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖/⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Feature-light but does the job with solid pics
Toshiba	BDX3200	£150	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	197	1 2 3 4 5	Unexciting player can't compete with rivals
Yamaha	BD-S667	£300	⊖	⊕	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖/⊖	189	1 2 3 4 5	Impressive but best partnered to a Yamaha AVR

NEW ENTRY

Workprint

BLU-RAY EXPLAINED...

MATCHING YOUR DECK TO YOUR AMP

Blu-ray decks are designed to deliver top-notch images (some do it much better than others of course) but Blu-ray is also about enjoying superior quality sound. When choosing a deck, bear in mind the connectivity and decoding features of your amplifier. If it's an older model that doesn't have HDMI inputs then you'll need a BD player with multichannel analogue audio outputs to enjoy hi-res surround sound formats. Most current AVRs have HDMI inputs that accept bitstreamed Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA, but not all receivers can cope with 3D video signals, in which case you'll need a deck with dual HDMI outputs – one for the amp, one for the TV.

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC

DMP-BDT310 → £260 Approx



This second-gen 3D deck improves on its BDT300 predecessor thanks to new tricks and a lower asking price. Standout features – alongside the excellent 2D and 3D playback – are Skype functionality, 2D-3D conversion, faster loading times and a revamped GUI that takes usability to the next level. Motion-sensitive controls bring even more to the party.

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

AV Receivers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Claimed power	THX	Multi-ch in	HDMI in	HDMI out	3D	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	Networking	Net tuner	Issue	Rating	Comment
Anthem	MRX 700	£2,100	7 x 120W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	195	1 2 3 4 5	Complex set-up, great EQ sound
Arcam	AVR400	£1,700	7 x 90W	⊖	⊕	5	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Beautifully built. Ace analogue audio
Denon	AVR-4311	£2,000	9 x 170W	⊖	⊕	6	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	193	1 2 3 4 5	Polished audio, Airplay streaming
Denon	AVR-1611	£350	7 x 110W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	191	1 2 3 4 5	Uses binding posts. Decent sound
Denon	AVR-2311	£800	7 x 135W	⊖	⊖	6	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	190	1 2 3 4 5	iPod dock but no networking
NEW ENTRY Denon	AVR-3312	£1,000	7 x 165W	⊖	⊖	7	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	202	1 2 3 4 5	New GUI, AirPlay as standard
Marantz	SR7005	£1,400	7 x 125W	⊖	⊕	6	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	187	1 2 3 4 5	Great home cinema amp
Marantz	NR1602	£550	7 x 50W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	201	1 2 3 4 5	Slimline AVR is forward-thinking
NAD	T 757	£1,500	7 x 60W	⊖	⊕	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	201	1 2 3 4 5	Limited features, but superb sound
Onkyo	TX-NR609	£500	7 x 60W	⊕	⊖	6	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	195	1 2 3 4 5	Comprehensive, stunning performer
Onkyo	TX-NR5008	£2,400	9 x 140W	⊕	⊕	8	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	191	1 2 3 4 5	Versatile and capable of brilliance
Onkyo	TX-SR308	£250	5 x 100W	⊖	⊖	3	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	191	1 2 3 4 5	Under specified and under powered
Pioneer	VSX-520	£300	5 x 130W	⊖	⊖	3	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	191	1 2 3 4 5	Decent sound; spring-clip terminals
Pioneer	SC-LX83	£2,000	7 x 190W	⊕	⊕	3	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	186	1 2 3 4 5	Punchy audio with superb control
Pioneer	VSX-920	£500	7 x 140W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	185	1 2 3 4 5	Cool iPod integration, lacks guts a bit
Pioneer	VSX-2021	£800	7 x 150W	⊕	⊕	7	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	200	1 2 3 4 5	Class-leading control and RoomEQ
Yamaha	RXV-3067	£1,500	7 x 140W	⊖	⊕	8	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	194	1 2 3 4 5	Superb and musical reproduction
Yamaha	RXV-367	£200	5 x 120W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊖	191	1 2 3 4 5	Budget spec and sound to match
Yamaha	RXV-471	£300	5 x 105W	⊖	⊖	4	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊖	199	1 2 3 4 5	Brilliant sounding entry-level AVR
Yamaha	RXV-1067	£850	7 x 105W	⊖	⊕	8	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊖	190	1 2 3 4 5	Optimised for cinema. Good connects

Systems



Manufacturer	Model	Price	3D	Claimed power	Configuration	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	HDMI in/out	Component	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
Harman/Kardon	BDS800	£1,100	⊖	525W	5.1	⊕	⊕	0/1	⊖	⊖	⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	Nil by 1080p24. OK performance
LG	HB-965TZ	£600	⊖	1,100W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊕	⊕	⊕	187	1 2 3 4 5	Lovely flat speakers and excellent GUI
Panasonic	SC-BTT775	£400	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	198	1 2 3 4 5	A decent starter system for AV novices
Panasonic	SC-BTT350	£370	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	0/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	190	1 2 3 4 5	Sonics don't match the versatility
Panasonic	SC-BT320	£400	⊖	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	1/1	⊕	⊕	⊖	187	1 2 3 4 5	Pics are ok but a right pain to use
Panasonic	SC-BTT330	£350	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	200	1 2 3 4 5	Affordable surround sound, old net portal
Samsung	HT-D6750W	£800	⊕	1,300W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊕	⊕	⊖	197	1 2 3 4 5	Claims to be 7.1 but isn't
Samsung	HT-C9950W	£2,000	⊕	1,000W	7.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊕	⊕	⊕	190	1 2 3 4 5	Perfect style match for Samsung's TVs
Samsung	HT-C6730	£600	⊖	1,330W	7.1	⊕	⊕	1/1	⊕	⊕	⊕	187	1 2 3 4 5	Room-filling sonics; wireless rear speakers
Sony	BDV-E370	£500	⊕	850W	5.1	⊕	⊕	0/1	⊕	⊕	⊕	187	1 2 3 4 5	Good sound at low volume; SACD playback
Sony	BDV-E880	£400	⊕	1,000W	5.1	⊕	⊕	2/1	⊖	⊕	⊕	201	1 2 3 4 5	Full of features but average audio

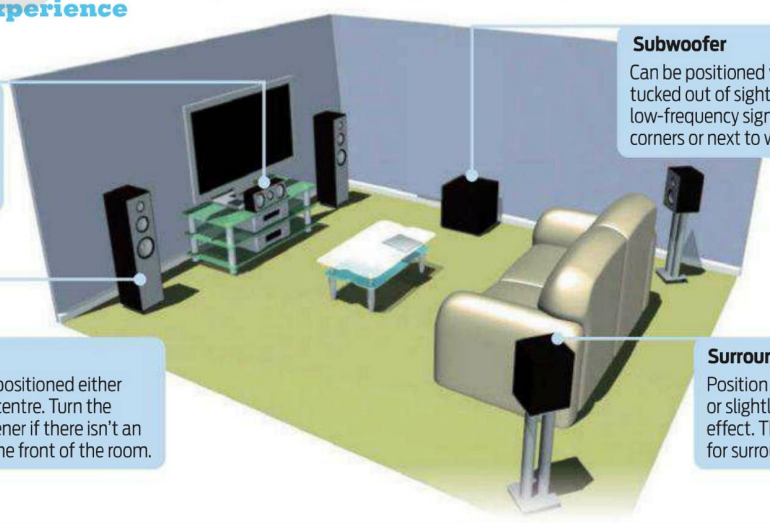
Speakers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Configuration	Front max power	Rear max power	Centre max power	Sub power	bookshelf	Issue	Rating	Comment	
Acoustic Energy	Aegis Neo Max	£1,900	7.1	2 x 200W	2 x 170W	120W	200W	surr	199	1 2 3 4 5	**With 2 x 120W surrounds. An awful lot of speakers for the money**	
Acoustic Energy	Compact/Neo	£850	6.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	200W	all	201	1 2 3 4 5	**6.1 system offers solid sonics**	
Artcoustic	Spitfire	£21,500	7.5	2 x 250W	2 x 250W	250W	250W	no	200	1 2 3 4 5	**Plus 2 x 150W surrounds. Wall-mountable speakers with might**	
Bowers & Wilkins	800 Diamond	£22,500	5.1	2 x 500W	2 x 120W	300W	1,000W	no	196	1 2 3 4 5	**Breathtaking sound, bonkers price**	
Cambridge Audio	Minx S325	£800	5.1	2 x 75W	2 x 75W	75W	300W	all	195	1 2 3 4 5	**Extraordinary power for dinky size**	
Canton	CD 105	£500	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	100W	all	196	1 2 3 4 5	**Potent but suited to smaller areas**	
Canton	Vento 800	£6,650	5.1	2 x 140W	2 x 80W	85W	750W	rear	194	1 2 3 4 5	**Fab definition & fidelity**	
Definitive Technology	Mythos XTR-50	£2,400	3.0	2 x 100W	n/a	100W	n/a	no	202	1 2 3 4 5	**Wall-mountable flatpanel speakers are a classy solution**	NEW ENTRY
EMP Tek	Impression	£4,000	7.1	2 x 200W	2 x 200W	120W	100W	surr	193	1 2 3 4 5	**With 2 x 100W surrounds. Thrilling**	
Image Audio	IA 8/5/C	£4,000	5.0	2 x 150W	2 x 150W	300W	n/a	no	195	1 2 3 4 5	**Excellent flat panel speakers**	
Jamo	S426 HCS3	£560	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 60W	90W	260W	rear	201	1 2 3 4 5	**Affordable floorstanding array**	
KEF	T-Series T205	£1,500	5.1	2 x 150W	2 x 100W	150W	250W	no	192	1 2 3 4 5	**Skinny and stylish. Immersive**	
Klipsch	HD Theatre	£500	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100w	100W	100W	all	192	1 2 3 4 5	**Horn tweeters are a tad rough**	
Magnat	Quantum 650	£1,700	5.1	2 x 350W	2 x 180W	180W	270W	rear	198	1 2 3 4 5	**Potent system at a good price**	
Monitor Audio	Apex	£2,425	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	200W	500W	rear	190	1 2 3 4 5	**Luxury styling and performance**	
Monitor Audio	Bronze BX	£1,350	5.1	2 x 120W	2 x 80W	120W	200W	rear	191	1 2 3 4 5	**Sub strains to keep up**	
Monitor Audio	Gold GX	£7,150	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 100W	200W	650W	no	202	1 2 3 4 5	**Gorgeous build and sonics**	NEW ENTRY
Paradigm	MilleniaOne	£2,500	5.1	2 x 50W	2 x 50W	50W	300W	all	201	1 2 3 4 5	**Premium-priced sub/sat package**	
Pioneer	S71	£2,600	5.1	2 x 130W	2 x 130W	130W	280W	rear	194	1 2 3 4 5	**Immersive sound. Severe looking**	
PSB	Image Series	£1,500	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 150W	150W	150W	rear	199	1 2 3 4 5	**Look great, sound tasty**	
Scandyna	Micropod SE/ The Ball	£900	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	60W	all	200	1 2 3 4 5	**Quirky design married to hi-tech drivers = slick style system**	
Tannoy	Definition	£8,200	5.0	2 x 400W	2 x 350W	350W	n/a	rear	197	1 2 3 4 5	**Worth every penny. Bring on the sub**	
Tannoy	Arena HL 300	£1,850	5.1	2 x 75W	2 x 75W	75W	300W	no	198	1 2 3 4 5	**High-end sub/sats with style**	
Teufel	Columa 100	£350	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	100W	no	195	1 2 3 4 5	**Energetic floorstanders. Ace sub**	
Teufel	Theatre 200	£800	5.1	2 x 140W	2 x 150W	140W	250W	all	195	1 2 3 4 5	**Bold sats, sub suffers colouration**	
Quadral	Chromium 5.1	£2,700	5.1	not given	not given	not given	150W	rear	197	1 2 3 4 5	**Top quality drivers, nice cabinets**	
XTZ	99 Series	£2,200	5.1	2 x 550W	2 x 100W	100W	300W	no	193	1 2 3 4 5	**Big, tunable sound. Mail-order**	

5.1 CLASSIC HOME CINEMA SPEAKER LAYOUT...

Follow these simple rules when laying out your system and you'll be guaranteed a great listening experience



Subwoofer
Can be positioned wherever it sounds best or can be tucked out of sight due to the non-directional nature of low-frequency signals. Be aware that close positioning in corners or next to walls can create a boomy effect.

Centre speaker
Handles most of the dialogue and onscreen effects. Should be positioned above or below the screen as close to it as possible.

Front speakers
Left and right speakers should be positioned either side of the screen, in line with the centre. Turn the speakers in slightly to face the listener if there isn't an even movement of sound across the front of the room.

Surround speakers
Position alongside the listener, pointing in or slightly behind the ears for a good surround effect. The back wall is not a good position for surrounds.

Projectors



Manufacturer	Model	Price (Original)	Type	Resolution	3D	HDMI	Component	12V trigger	Fan noise/dB	lamp life/hr	Issue	Rating	Comment
BenQ	W1100	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	22	2,500	197	1 2 3 4 5	Dynamic images, noisy fan
BenQ	W1000+	£750	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	26	5,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Performance transcends price
Casio	XJ-A235	£1,000	DLP	1280 x 800	⊖	1	0	0	29	20,000	192	1 2 3 4 5	LED/DLP hybrid. Poor pics
Epson	EH-TW3600	£1,300	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	22	4,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Bright pics but average black levels
InFocus	SP8600	£800	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	30	2,500	198	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent sub-£1k projector
InFocus	SP8604	£2,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	3	1	2	28	3,000	196	1 2 3 4 5	Versatile PJ with decent pictures
InFocus	SP8602	£3,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	3	3	28	2,500	182	1 2 3 4 5	Good pics with minor operating flaws
JVC	DLA-X3	£3,600	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	20	3,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Aces 2D images, X-talk with 3D
JVC	DLA-X7	£5,550	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	20	3,000	195	1 2 3 4 5	Brightness and black level to die for
JVC	DLA-HD990	£9,000	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	19	3,000	185	1 2 3 4 5	Gorgeous with amazing black levels
Optoma	HD67N	£500	DLP	1280 x 720	⊖	1	2	0	29	3,000	194	1 2 3 4 5	With so-so 3D using a 3D-Xl adapter
Optoma	HD20	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	1	2	0	29	4,000	176	1 2 3 4 5	One of the first budget Full HD PJs
Panasonic	PT-AE4000	£2,500	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	22	2,000	177	1 2 3 4 5	Filmic pictures and easy to setup
NEW ENTRY Panasonic	PT-AT5000	£3,200	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊕	3	1	2	22	4,000	202	1 2 3 4 5	Good connectivity, superb images
Runco	LS-5	£7,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	2	2	30	4,000	187	1 2 3 4 5	3-chip performance from one chip
Sanyo	PLV-Z4000	£1,800	LCD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	2	1	19	3,000	191	1 2 3 4 5	Quiet. Yellow-ish but filmic images
Sharp	XV-Z17000	£4,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	0	n/a	n/a	196	1 2 3 4 5	Living room friendly, 3D impresses
SIM2	MICO 40	£11,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	2	n/a	30,000	189	1 2 3 4 5	Eco-friendly LED-lit and versatile
SIM2	C3X Lumis Uno	£19,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	3	32	2,500	184	1 2 3 4 5	Supreme pics but lacks manual iris
SIM2	Lumis 3D-S	£30,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	3	n/a	3,000	199	1 2 3 4 5	Reference level 3D projector
Sony	VPL-VW90ES	£5,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	1	22	n/a	192	1 2 3 4 5	Great option for a 3D CI build
Sony	VPL-VW85	£5,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	20	3,000	174	1 2 3 4 5	Elderly but impressive SXRD PJ
Sony	VPL-HW20	£2,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	0	20	n/a	190	1 2 3 4 5	Complex but capable of greatness
Sony	VPL-HW30ES	£3,100	SXRD	1920 x 1080	⊕	2	1	0	22	n/a	201	1 2 3 4 5	Sony's most affordable 3D offering
ViewSonic	Pro8200	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	27	3,000	192	1 2 3 4 5	Falters with motion resolution
NEW ENTRY ViewSonic	Pro8450	£1,500	DLP	1280 x 1200	⊖	1	1	1	27	4,000	202	1 2 3 4 5	3D-ready business PJ lacks Full HD
Vivitek	H9080FD	£10,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	n/a	4,000	173	1 2 3 4 5	World's first 'lampless' LED projector
Vivitek	H1085	£1,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	2	1	1	26	4,000	179	1 2 3 4 5	Affordable DLP PJ could be quieter
Vivitek	H5080	£2,700	DLP	1920 x 1080	⊖	3	1	2	27	2,000	186	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent contrast and colour. Noisy

PROJECTOR SCREENS EXPLAINED...

FIXED FRAME OR ROLL AWAY?

When buying a projector, it's important to think about what screen you're going to partner it with. There are two main approaches – fixed-frame, where the screen is placed in a rigid frame and attached permanently to the wall, or 'roll-away' where it can be rolled up when not in use, including via neat, motorised systems. For the best picture quality and dedicated cinema rooms, fixed frame is preferable, as permanent screens generally stay more tautly stretched and deliver the most accurate pictures. Roll-away screens are more suited to when the room needs to double as a living room. Pricing, of course, varies depending on what size you need.

Editor's Choice...



SONY
SXRD → VPL-VW90ES
→ £5,400 Approx

Sony's range-topping projector marries an exemplary 2D picture performance with one of the best active shutter 3D systems we've seen. And, aside from its video prowess, it features smart design, solid build and versatile installation options.

Tested: Issue 192
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk/biz

Media Players



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Type	HDD	3D	HDMI	DLNA	Online portal	USB playback	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
AC Ryan	PlayOn! HD Essential	£130	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊕	194	1 2 3 4 5	No wired Ethernet option, so you have to network via wi-fi dongle
AC Ryan	PlayOn! HD 2	£150	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	202	1 2 3 4 5	Well featured and a good performer
Boxee	Boxee Box	£200	VOD	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊖	⊕	193	1 2 3 4 5	iPlayer access. Browser is a pain to use
Buffalo	Linkstation Pro LS-VL	£170	NAS	1TB	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	192	1 2 3 4 5	Speedy and reliable with Bit Torrent client. 1.5TB and 2TB versions are also available
Crystal Acoustics	PICOHD5.1	£50	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	199	1 2 3 4 5	Small, no frills media player
Crystal Acoustics	Media Matchbox	£55	Player	⊖	⊖	1	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	202	1 2 3 4 5	Extensive file support includes lossless audio and BD ISOs. Keenly priced, ultra portable
Digital Stream	DPS-1000	£90	VOD	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	196	1 2 3 4 5	Good for VOD services, no optical out
Iomega	StorCenter IX2-200	£215	NAS	2TB	⊖	0	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕	182	1 2 3 4 5	Pocket-sized powerhouse with handy one-touch USB copy
Iomega	Screenplay MX	£140	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	194	1 2 3 4 5	No optical audio out or hi-res audio
iXtreamer	iXtreamer	£150	NAS	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	199	1 2 3 4 5	Slick player with space for SATA HDD
Netgear	NeoTV 550	£140	Player	⊖	⊖	1		⊕	⊕	⊕	199	1 2 3 4 5	Solid offering but file support isn't comprehensive
Netgear	ReadyNAS NVX	£500	NAS	1TB	⊖	0	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	185	1 2 3 4 5	Tank-like NAS can accommodate up to 8TB of storage – a serious bit of hardware
Popbox	Popbox 3D	£140	Player	⊖	⊕	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	199	1 2 3 4 5	Offers BBC iPlayer and MKV3D file support
Sony	SMP-N100	£120	VOD	⊖	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	193	1 2 3 4 5	Bravia Internet TV and streaming aplenty
Synology	USB Station 2	£85	Player	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	193	1 2 3 4 5	Simply add your own USB hard disks
Synology	DS410	£400	Player	⊖	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	190	1 2 3 4 5	Accommodates up to 8TB of SATA drives
Teufel	MediaStation 6	£270	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	200	1 2 3 4 5	Freeview HD toting player has hideous UI
Toshiba	Stor.E TV+	£170	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊖	195	1 2 3 4 5	Tosh's cute unit supports a wide range of formats
Verbatim	MediaShare	£130	NAS	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	188	1 2 3 4 5	Stylish, well-featured NAS
WD	WD TV Live Hub	£200	Player	1TB	⊖	1	⊕	⊖	⊕	⊕	190	1 2 3 4 5	Superb multi-format player
WD	WD TV Mini	£48	Player	⊖	⊖	0	⊖	⊖	⊕	⊖	189	1 2 3 4 5	Tiny media player lacks HDMI output

NEW ENTRY

NEW ENTRY

HOME CINEMA Choice

ISSUE #204 ON SALE Jan 12

➜In the next issue

The home cinema of the future What your setup will be in five year's time
Sony's plans for 4K video From digital cinemas to your own living room
Blu-ray's most-wanted 10 movies that aren't available in HD – but should be!

➜On test

PHILIPS 'MOTH EYE' TV Can it deliver best-in-class blacks? EPSON EH-TW5900 Full HD 3D PJ for under £1K DENON AVR-1912 7.1-channel AV receiver SONY SVR-HDT1000 1TB Freeview HD PVR BOSTON ACOUSTICS A SERIES 5.1 floorstanding array PLUS In-depth news, Blu-ray reviews and more

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Recorders



	Manufacturer	Model	Price (*plus subscription)	Type	HDD/GB	HDMI	Component	Scart	USB Media	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
NEW ENTRY	Panasonic	DMR-PWT500	£400	F'view HD	320	1	0	0	⊕	⊕	⊕	202	1 2 3 4 5	BD/PVR combi needs bigger HDD
	Echostar	HDS-600RS	£350	F'sat HD	500	1	0	2	⊕	⊕	⊖	196	1 2 3 4 5	Solid PVR with built-in SlingPlayer feature
	Panasonic	DMR-BWT700	£500	F'view HD	320	1	0	1	⊕	⊕	⊕	197	1 2 3 4 5	Complex with Blu-ray recorder and 3D player
	Sagemcom	DTR67320T	£150	F'view	320	1	1	2	⊕	⊖	⊖	201	1 2 3 4 5	No HD tuners, but can import/export media
	Samsung	SMT-S7800	£280	F'sat HD	500	1	0	2	⊕	⊕	⊕	197	1 2 3 4 5	Good recorder, scant internet TV offering
	Samsung	BD-DT7800	£280	F'view HD	500	1	1	0	⊕	⊕	⊕	201	1 2 3 4 5	Can't record two channels at once
	Toshiba	HDR5010	£200	F'view HD	500	3	1	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	201	1 2 3 4 5	Good twin-tuner offering, but no iPlayer yet
	TVonics	DTR-Z500HD	£225	F'view HD	500	3	0	1	⊕	⊖	⊖	201	1 2 3 4 5	Firmware has added BBC iPlayer
	Virgin Media	TiVo	£200*	Cable TV	1TB	1	0	1	⊖	⊕	⊖	195	1 2 3 4 5	Awesome 3-tuner PVR. No BBC red button

Subwoofers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Sealed/ported	Power (RMS)	Frequency response/Hz	Driver size	Dimensions/ (w x h x d)mm	Weight/kg	Issue	Rating	Comment
BK Electronics	XXLS400DF	£410	S	400W	19-120	12in	400 x 460 x400	28	196	1 2 3 4 5	Clean and tight; great value
Bowers & Wilkins	DB1	£3,250	S	1,000W	17-45	12in x 2	460 x 490 x 410	44	197	1 2 3 4 5	Bipolar arrangement, ripping
Paradigm	Seismic 110	£1,250	S	850W	18-150	10in	298 x 343 x 320	17	188	1 2 3 4 5	AKA The Bulldog and has real bite
Paradigm	SUB1	£5,000	S	1,700W	35-150	8in x 6	505 x 516 x 455	50	197	1 2 3 4 5	Unorthodox hexagonal shape
REL	T3	£430	S	150W	30-120	8in	300 x 343 x 356	13	186	1 2 3 4 5	Amazing sound for compact size
SV Sound	PC 12 Plus DSP	£1,250	P	800W	10-150	12.5in	1,022 x 407	39	198	1 2 3 4 5	Cylindrical sub for big spaces
Velodyne	DD18+	£5,800	S	1,250W	8.8-300	18in	530 x 580 x 650	65	197	1 2 3 4 5	Huge 18in driver, muscular sound
Velodyne	SPL-800 Ultra	£1,150	S	1,200W	16-240	8in	267 x 280 x 356	33	201	1 2 3 4 5	Compact but potent; nice finish
NEW ENTRY Wharfedale	SPC-10	£300	S	215W	35-120	10in	352 x 382 x 305	11	202	1 2 3 4 5	Affordable, but lacks grunt

Soundbars



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Power	Separate sub	Sub power	HDMI in	HDMI out	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	Dimensions/ (w x h x d)mm	Weight/kg	Issue	Rating	Comment
Lenco	SB-100	£140	80W	⊖	N/A	0	0	⊖	⊖	540 x 110 x 165	1.4	199	1 2 3 4 5	Budget, but '3D' effect is good
Orbitsound	T12	£300	80W	⊕	20W	0	0	⊖	⊖	605 x 100 x 110	2.8	186	1 2 3 4 5	Offers integrated iPod dock
Panasonic	SC-HTB520	£300	120W	⊕	120W	1	1	⊖	⊖	1002 x 80 x 50	2.5	199	1 2 3 4 5	HDMI but no TrueHD/DTS-HD
Samsung	HWC450	£250	160W	⊕	120W	0	0	⊖	⊖	957 x 92 x 46	2.3	182	1 2 3 4 5	Affordable, has wireless sub
Teufel	Cinebar 50	£670	200W	⊕	150W	0	0	⊖	⊖	1010 x 130 x 100	8	182	1 2 3 4 5	Punchy sound but not cheap
Yamaha	YSP-2200	£800	132W	⊕	100W	3	1	⊕	⊕	435 x 137 x 350	6	196	1 2 3 4 5	Effective surround sound

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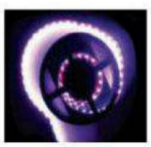
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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson wonders if smartphones and tablets are key to keeping bigscreen, home cinema entertainment alive

The heyday of television is over, and the mobile phone is now more important to young people than the traditional goggle-box. I bring you this revelation thanks to Ofcom's ongoing, tax-payer funded research into stating the bleeding obvious. I can't remember the last time I actually saw the face of a teenager. They either have their noses pressed into a smartphone or are wearing a hoodie, presumably just prior to breaking into the Carphone Warehouse.

Smartphone sales are up, despite the fact that mobile phone subscription across Europe is already around 120 per cent. Yes, not only has almost everyone got a mobile phone, but one in every five of us is running two of them.

At the same time the UK TV screen market is in freefall. Some 10-12 per cent fewer TVs were bought in the past 12 months compared to the previous year, despite the improvements in HD, 3D and Smart tech. So are mobile phones ringing the death knell of sitting around the TV?

Big, bold App

Well, no. I would say that not only will smartphones become intrinsically linked to all forms of home entertainment, they could actually spark a renaissance in bigscreen viewing, a brave new world where we are all beholden to these 'pocket-sized' packets of technology.

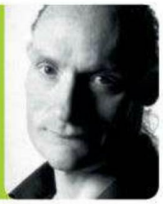
Even now, virtually all home cinema hardware manufacturers have an App remote control interface either available or waiting for imminent release. Okay, maybe not NAD. Just look at Pioneer's superb iControl AV to see what can be done right now as a first or second-generation control App. Of course, Crestron, AMX and Pronto had offered this level of touchscreen control for years, but it was always too expensive and setting it up required knowledge of an unfathomable programming language. The smartphone and tablet have changed all that. Fully-functional touchscreen control is just another feature on a device that most people will have bought for its primary functionality anyway. When you add features like Pioneer's interactive instruction manual, it is easy to predict that **App-based interfaces will become absolutely standard across all networked home electronics in the near future**.

But that is not the killer App for TV's survival. It will be your smart device's ability to sort and access cloud-based content that will ensure bigscreen entertainment is here to stay. Home cinema is rapidly moving from linear broadcast and disc-based media to a fully flexible 'on-demand' service with a utopian ideal of everything available all of the time. The smartphone or tablet are the only easy and convenient means of navigating all that content from the comfort of your sofa; seamlessly sifting and filtering films, sport, live broadcast, catch-up TV, YouTube etc. at the swipe of a finger.

There has never been so much screen-based entertainment content and all of it, save perhaps low-res YouTube footage, benefits from viewing on a screen. Whether the content is accessed through the TV using a smart device as a controller or accessed by the device and mirrored to a big screen is virtually irrelevant. What smartphones and tablets have brought us is a fantastic user-friendly gateway to access near infinite content while you are in front of a flatscreen. And they're getting more affordable by the minute. Surely that can only mean a rebirth of TV-based home entertainment?

So next time you see a yoof with their mitts on a handheld device, go over, pat them on the back and thank them for saving home cinema. Then, ask them how to record iPlayer to the iCloud using an iPad – because soon you will need to know

Dumped your remote in favour of a tablet or smartphone? Tell us how it's going via letters@homecinemachoice.com



Richard Stevenson likes to sit on the backseat of the bus, listening to Pink Floyd's *The Wall* via the tiny tinny speaker on his iPhone

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